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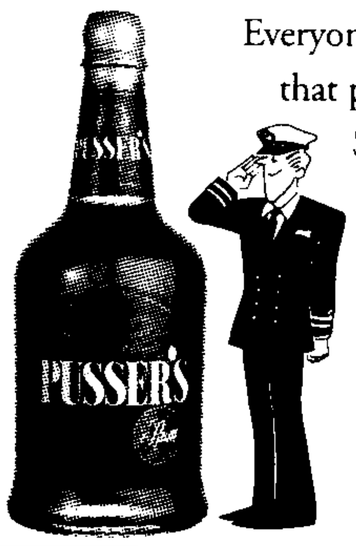

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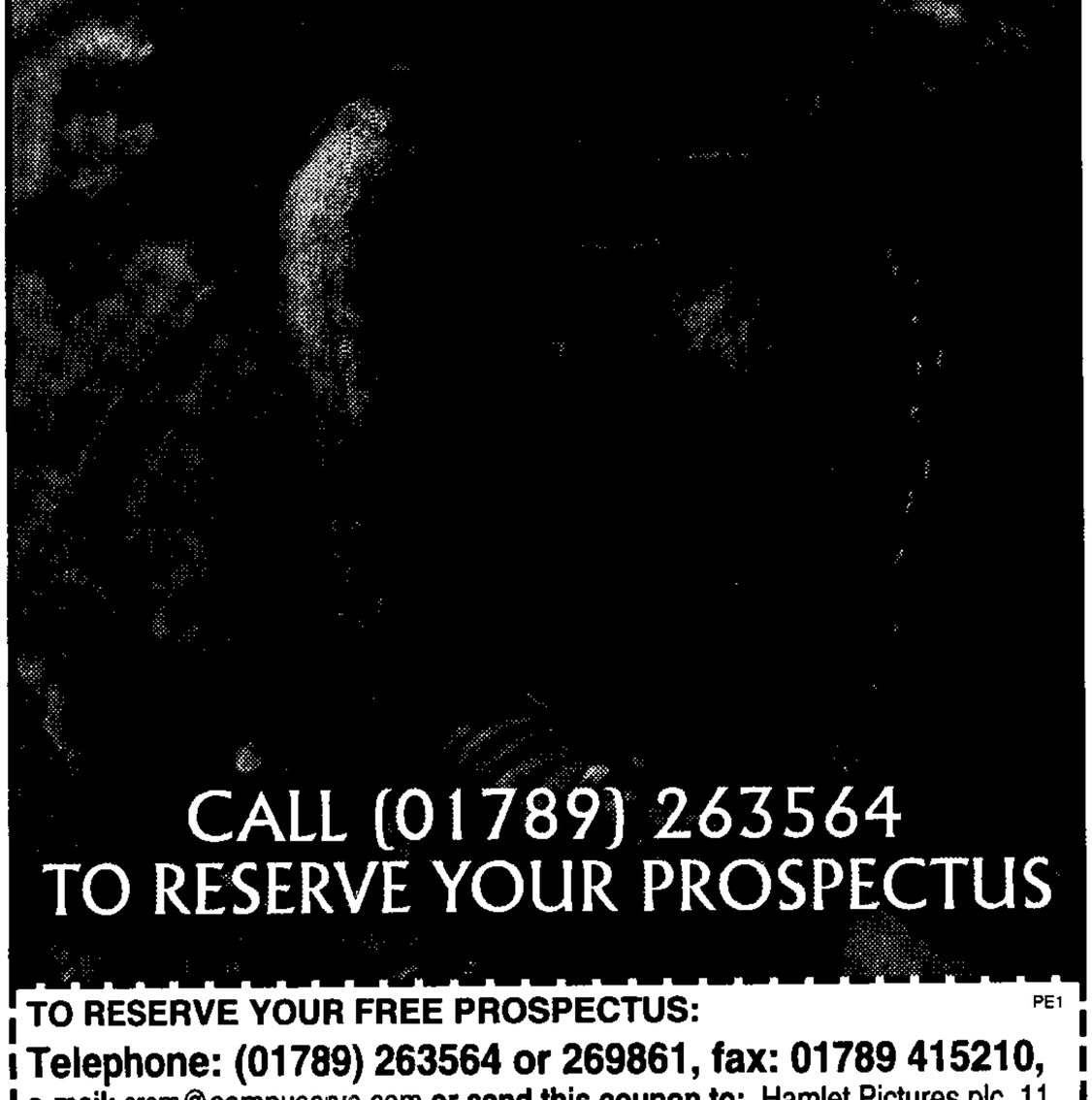

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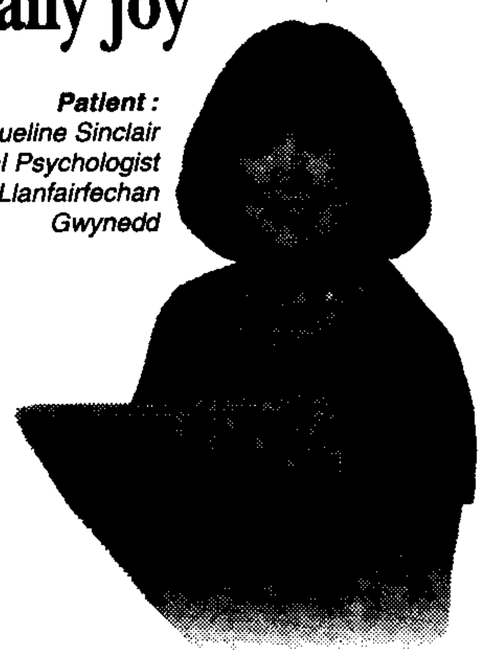

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COLOUR SECTION

AT THE Labour party conference in October 1996, no one won louder cheers than shadow transport secretary Andrew Smith. "The Tories have dreamed up a crazy new scheme to privatise the air!" he roared. "They want to flog off the national air traffic control service. Let me warn the transport secretary: Labour will do everything to block this sell-off. Our air is not for sale!"

Surprise, surprise: John Prescott is now preparing to force the "crazy scheme" through parliament on a three-line whip. Yet as recently as January 1999 the transport select committee urged him to shelve the sell-off for at least three years, not least because of the continuing computer fiasco at the huge air traffic control centre in Swanwick, Hampshire. This new centre, which goes by the charming acronym NERC (New En Route Centre) was due to open in 1996 but won't see service until 2002 at the earliest. The committee warned that safety might be "compromised for the sake of profit".

Has anything changed since then? Indeed it has: the Swanwick cock-up has gone from bad to worse. The independent auditor has uncovered an extra £148m in costs, taking the current total price to £623m – more than double the original estimate.

As with other disasters, Labour's solution is to reward the culprits. Lockheed, which is installing the non-working computers into NERC, has been slipped an extra £120m. Meanwhile, the contract for another big air traffic control centre, at Prestwick in Scotland, has been awarded to "Sky Solutions" – which turns out to be none other than Lockheed again, teamed up with the builder Bovis.

During the past decade Lockheed has been moving heavily into civil contracts – from warfare to welfare – but here too the results have not all been happy. In 1997, after five years of struggling, California's govenor Pete Wilson cancelled a $171m contract with Lockheed to run child-support payments, calling the system unworkable and beginning a lawsuit against the company. In the same year Connecticut terminated a $14.3m computer system handling the state's foster-care payments, after $8m had been sent out in overpayments by mistake. In 1998, Lockheed admitted that the first year of its Baltimore child-support-collection programme fell more than 22 per cent behind its promised performance.

Unembarrassed by these transatlantic failures the company recently set up a British subsidiary, Lockheed Martin UK, to pursue "joint ventures" with the Labour government. The board of Lockheed Martin UK includes Tory ex-minister John Patten and Sir Anthony Cleaver, a former chairman of Fareham Tories. But in the spirit of "new politics" these people are also well connected to Labour. Blair gave Cleaver a job on the committee for standards in public life; Margaret Beckett put him on the medical research council, saying she was "delighted" to recruit such a distinguished and experienced figure; Barbara Roche kept him on at the industrial development advisory board.

However, Cleaver has also been associated with two of the biggest public-sector rip-offs of the last two decades. He was chief executive and chairman of IBM UK in the late 1980s, when IBM and Arthur Andersen sold a £63m computer system to the NHS in a joint venture marked by fantastic conflicts of interest and technical problems (see *Eyes* passim). The system failed absolutely and had to be abandoned.

Cleaver was then made chairman of the atomic energy authority, with a mission to privatise it. About £131m was spent fattening up the company for market. But the sell-off was heavily criticised by the national audit office as shares in the privatised wing – AEA Technology – soared after the sale, showing that yet another public asset had been flogged too cheaply. Cleaver was rewarded with the chairmanship of, er, AEA Technology.

Now, having already bagged Swanwick and Prestwick, Lockheed Martin has been given a £130m contract to computerise letter-sorting for the Royal Mail. Be sure to post your Christmas cards early – preferably this week.

SO, CHANCELLOR Gordon Brown is threatening mortgage lenders with statutory regulation if they don't stop ripping people off with hidden costs, penalty charges, long lock-in deals and a failure to pass on better interest rates to borrowers.

At the moment, home-buyers are at the mercy of a rather snag-toothed self-regulatory body, with the unsnappy title of the mortgage code register of intermediaries (MCRI).

Brown might consider putting it on a statutory footing, when he learns that Monty Burn, the man at the MCRI who blew the whistle on the mortgage industry's sharp practices, has just been sacked – while his boss, Colin Harris, has apparently been awarded both a five-figure one-off merit award and a pay rise.

Last week Mr Burn was dismissed as mortgage regulator for what appears to be no more than doing his job – detailing the industries' scams and the lack of effective protection for the consumer – in a lengthy report, called "The Mortgage Bible". Mr Burn suggested that up to half of all house-buyers may be getting a raw deal from mis-selling or hidden charges. Yet he said that the MCRI had received fewer than 400 complaints, because people did not know they were being cheated, nor where to take their grievances. Until May this year, the MCRI had no disciplinary powers, and even now Mr Burn suggests their voluntary nature means they can be easily side-stepped.

Mr Burn was told he was being sacked for "gross misconduct", an allegation on which the MCRI has refused to elaborate. Its chairman, Colin Harris, told the *Eye* he could not comment upon what was an employment issue. Neither was he prepared to discuss his salary or any suggested bonus, as that too was confidential. Monty Burn, meanwhile, is preparing for a meeting with Treasury officials, who are about to bring out a consultation paper on the mortgage industry.

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SINN FEIN LATEST

"5, 4, 3, 2, 1..."

Street Of Shame

TO LOSE one member of your family might be considered a misfortune; to lose practically your entire dynasty to a series of freak accidents, lobotomies, drug addictions and the bullets of various assassins is a chance for some really juicy copy.

The only thing that divided the Street of Shame was whether such a godsend on a slow news day as John Kennedy Jr's death was simply a coincidence, or whether there was a greater force guiding it all.

"There is no 'Kennedy Curse', of course", opined Ben Macintyre in the *Times*, before going into a lengthy oration which took in *Hamlet* and *King Lear* before concluding with the latter's Duke of Gloucester that the only rational explanation was a set of bloody-minded gods. Meanwhile the paper appeared to have drafted in Mystic Meg to write their leader column, which talked of "the patterns of destiny in each of our lives" and "a divinity which shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will".

Over in the *Guardian*, Decca Aitkenhead was scornful of such ideas. "People are talking utter nonsense about 'the curse of the Kennedys'," she disdainfully pronounced, her view only slightly undermined by the paper's headline on page two: "DOOMED FLIGHT INTO DARKNESS".

Peter McHackey in the *Daily Mail* was equally dour about such nonsense. "Talk about a 'curse of the Kennedys' is foolish", he reassured his more impressionable readers, who might have been misled by the paper's double page spread on the "DEATH OF CAMELOT", which portentously opened: "The Curse of the Kennedys has struck again."

IN A RECENT phone call to Chris Blackhurst, deputy editor of the *Express*, PR man Brian Basham broached a delicate matter.

He explained that Brendan Hopkins, managing director of the *Independent*, wanted the *Express* to lay off Janet Street-Porter, the sensitive flower who is the new editor of the *Sindie*. Having once notoriously lambasted the BBC for being dominated by a management that is male, middle-class, middle-aged and mediocre, Janet now seems to be relying on the protection of Hopkins and Basham – who belong to at least three of these categories.

JANET STREET-PORTER has been quick to reassure staff at the Sindie that the paper won't abandon serious political coverage to make room for stories on the Pet Shop Boys. To prove the point, at morning conference last week she presided over a discussion on the state of the Conservative Party. After various political hacks had had their say on the respective merits of William Hague and his predecessor, Janet delivered her own opinion. "The thing about John Major," she revealed, "is that he obviously had a big dick. You only had to look at him to see he had a really big one."

RIGHT up to date as ever the *Mirror's* showbiz columnist Matthew Wright informed readers on 13 July that pop group Another Level will be taking over a DJ slot once a week on London's Kiss FM dance music station.

On 12 July Wright had revealed details of the band's physical training sessions: "Gladiator Hunter got punched in the face when he agreed to train my pals in Another Level".

Who is the source of his sparkling stream of celebrity gossip? Could it be the R&B band's public relations whizz – Jane Wright of The Wright Publicity and, er, wife of Matthew?

Despite his top notch contacts Wright is not immune to bouts of professional jealousy. When he heard recently that his opposite number on the *Sun*, Dominic Mohan, had got a part in the new James Bond movie *The World Is Not Enough*, he rang the publicity officer at film company UIP and screamed: "Don't you know I'm a trained actor?"

ANNA BLUNDY, Moscow correspondent of The Times, wrote an op ed piece last month criticising the Russian communist leader Gennadi Zyuganov. She described a conversation conducted on a yacht in the Caribbean earlier this year: "Some former members of Boris Yeltsin's team, all of whom still wield influence in the Kremlin, were lying on deck with various colleagues of the high-profile billionaire Boris Berezovsky."

How was Blundy privy to such top-level chit-chat? Was it passed down by the supreme ruler of News International, from the time when he was negotiating to buy 20 per cent of the shares in Russia's main TV channel, ORT, from Berezovsky? Yachts are certainly a favourite meeting place for the two tycoons. Berezovsky was one of the guests of honour aboard Murdoch's yacht in New York harbour on 25 June when the Digger wed the lovely Wendi Deng.

Now that Murdoch hopes to break into Russia, much as he did in China, will his British organs have to adjust their line on the Balkans and other subjects dear to the heart of his new friends? When Chris Patten complained about the Digger's arslikhan towards the Chinese government, one of Murdoch's most loyal defenders was *The Times*'s Beijing correspondent James Pringle. By happy coincidence, Pringle has just been appointed Balkan editor.

THE subject of this year's *New Statesman* Webb essay prize is: "What is a just war in the 21st century?"

One of the judges is Pauline Neville Jones (see *Eyes* passim), former political director of the foreign and commonwealth office, who later distinguished herself by accompanying her former boss, Douglas Hurd, to sign a lucrative consultancy deal with the butcher of Belgrade, Slobodan Milosevic, to help privatise Serbia's telecommunications.

Webb prize entrants, earnestly discussing the wars of the 20th century, might be well advised to steer clear of the one that has just taken place in the Balkans.

THERE ARE many contentious issues which exercise the citizens of our capital, and London's *Evening Standard* has a deep grasp of the most important. "Dressing children is never easy," its *ES* supplement bemoaned last week.

In an effort to prove this important point, *ES* picked a truly representative sample of models for their juvenile fashion shoot, which featured the sons and daughters of *Times* fashion editor Lisa Armstrong, *Vogue* editor Alexandra Shulman, *ES* editor Louise Chunn and her picture editor Wendy Hinton, as well as another hack, a photographer and a casting director.

DETERMINED to procure every available luxury during his stay at Standford Hill open prison Jonathan Aitken telephoned the local shop in the neighbouring village of Eastchurch to put in an order for his daily newspapers.

He was at first turned down by the shopkeeper, who demanded he pay up front, and was forced to ask one of his daughters to arrange for a cheque for £4.25 to be sent to the shop.

Even when he had received the cheque the shopkeeper waited until it had been cashed to make the delivery, telling his assistant: "What do I know? The guy could be a crook." Indeed, you cannot be too careful these days.

NEW horror stories are emerging from Kosovo – many of them featuring boorish Mirror hack Don Mackay.

Mackay, a bibulous Scot who distinguished himself a few months ago by smashing a statuette at the British Press Awards spent much of the war in Macedonia, amazing the natives and refugees with his diplomatic skills. In the bar of the Hotel Continental in Skopje one evening, he overheard the *Mirror*'s interpreter, Jakob, talking to another Albanian in their native tongue. "Why can't you fucking speak English?" he yelled. On another occasion he complained that his dinner wasn't hot enough. "You fucking Macedonian cunts!" he screamed at the waiters. "We're trying to protect you and you serve us with cold fish!"

On the night before Nato troops entered Kosovo, Mackay attended a press conference given by General Sir Michael Jackson. "Can't understand a word you're saying," the General murmured in reply to one of Mackay's questions. "Could you put the microphone next to your mouth?"

"It's normally a bottle next to my mouth," the *Mirror*man quipped.

"Yes," Jackson agreed with a grimace, "I know." As well he might, since the army had already lodged a complaint about Mackay's drunken antics.

Fellow members of the press corps hoped that Mackay might calm down a bit once they were actually in Kosovo, not least because there would be less drink available. But on arriving in Pristina he was soon propping up the bar and holding forth as offensively as ever – so much so that a *Mirror* photographer, Roger Allen, grabbed his loutish colleague by the neck and tried to throttle him. Other hacks had to intervene to prevent collateral damage, while *Mirror* hack Harry Arnold rang the London office to warn that Mackay was now "totally out of control". He was hastily recalled to Canary Wharf, and some semblance of peace at last descended on war-torn Kosovo.

FURTHER news of multi-talented hack Peter Kellner, who provides dispassionate political analysis for the Evening Standard and the BBC while also being a director and shareholder in the lobbying company Political Context Ltd.

On 30 March this year, Kellner published a feature under the heading "Revealed: How Hard the Life Peers Really Work". As we revealed in the last *Eye*, two of the peers singled out for praise – Lord Clement-Jones and Baroness Thornton – were on the payroll of Political Context Ltd.

When Kellner next writes about the subject one wonders if he will add Catherine Ashton to the roll of honour. Ashton, who was made a new labour working peeress last month, is not only a director of Political Context Ltd; she also happens to be married to Peter Kellner.

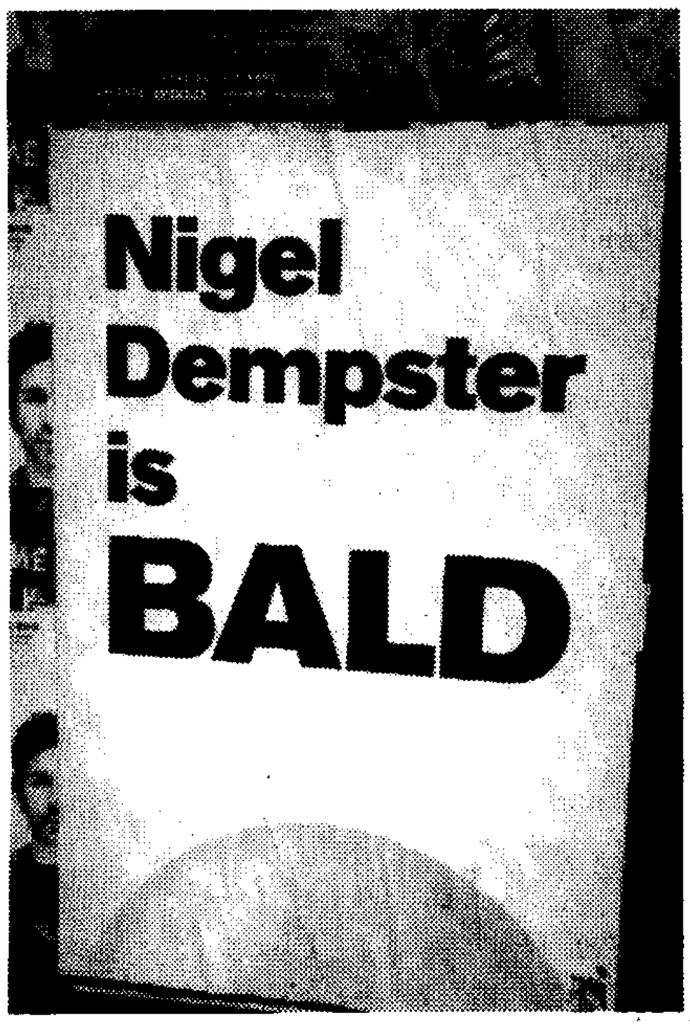
NOT SO YOUNG *TORYGRAPH*

"But the main reason why Posh [Spice] is a worthy successor to the Queen Mother is that they are both staunch troupers, with a sense of duty, or 'devoir' as the Queen Mother calls it. 'I've never known anyone so stoic,' said a Clarence House aide. The same could be said of Posh. Neither are whingers."

– Alice Thompson, *Daily Telegraph*
(Nominated by K Baldock)

CHAMPAGNE corks exploded at the *Financial Times* as it was announced that louche social affairs correspondent, Simon Buckby was leaving the paper to join the pro-single currency outfit "Britain in Europe" as campaigns director.

But this was nothing at the joy of Buckby himself, who spent his remaining moments at the *FT* on his mobile phone barking out to mates that he had "trebled" his money. Buckby a former aide to John Prescott and crony of Mandy Mandelson, has a legendary news sense. As rumours of the emerging summer passport crisis at Petit France reached the *FT*, Buckby airily announced that it was "pointless" for any journalist to head for Petit France as his contacts at the Home Office had told him that there "simply wasn't a problem." The following day, the newspapers were full of pictures of heaving humanity desperately trying to have their passports renewed. Such foresight will no doubt serve the ambitious Buckby well in his new job.



***MAIL* hacks are baffled by a mysterious rash of fly-posters which have gone up around their Kensington headquarters.**

In day-glo yellow, they pronounce in bold letters an intriguing message which appears to refer to their esteemed diarist, the Greatest Living Englishman, Nigel Pratt-Dumpster:

HOW STORIES HAPPEN

THE threat to contaminate England's water supplies, from a sinister Dublin-based group called the Scottish National Liberation Army (SNLA), was evidently deadly serious. It required two cabinet meetings, D-notice committee sessions, a news blackout and eventually – just in time for the Sunday newspaper deadlines – a Downing Street press briefing.

In reality, as the police on both sides of the Irish Sea know full well, this organisation only exists inside the troubled mind of one Adam Busby and a couple of his equally disturbed friends. Essentially a community care case, Busby, who is now nearly 50, joined the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders after leaving school. Convictions for petty crime led to his discharge and precipitated a major act of political terrorism – trying to write nationalist slogans with a felt pen on an army truck.

Fleeing Scotland, he claimed political asylum in Dublin, from where he posted a series of "letter bombs" – actually Jiffy bags containing no explosives. Most disquieting for the recipients, certainly, as were the torrent of threatening phone calls and fax messages sent to politicians and media outlets in Scotland and England. But not exactly major terrorist incidents. But because of obsolete Irish legislation (since repealed) these acts were classed as "political offences" precluding extradition.

The SNLA's latest threat, to poison the water supply with garden weedkiller, was technically impossible – because of the process of dilution which occurs when you chuck a couple of drums of anything into a reservoir containing millions of gallons of water.

The police, though, decided to take no chances, reasoning that the information contained in his threatening letters meant that Busby must have access to top secret blueprints detailing Britain's water system. In fact, his "intelligence" was gleaned by spending an hour in a Dublin internet cafe (although admittedly this is probably more useful than the methods generally employed by the funny people at MI5). Busby was detained then allowed to go back to the decrepit Dublin bedsit from which he directs his revolutionary campaign against the Blair regime.

The police on both sides of the water had proved their anti-terrorist credentials, while Blair and Ahern showed themselves to be strong and decisive leaders. And what was that sound in the background? The IRA, the UDA and the UVF, pissing themselves laughing.

HACKWATCH

JUST below the masthead of *The Times* is the "flannel panel", a box identifying two or three of the most important articles in that day's paper. "Kosovo: The 80 Days' War", it announced last Thursday. "*Times* writers bring you the first draft of history. Pullout section, pages 41-50."

No false modesty there. But if future scholars rely on the paper's flannel panel as a guide, what can we expect from their histories of 1999?

1 June. "America raves over *Notting Hill*." Cue picture of gorgeous pouting Julia Roberts.

2 June. A big photo of another gorgeous pouter under the headline "Now for a financial makeover." Who she? Anne Ashworth, personal finance editor.

3 June. A photo of Emma Noble in her wedding outfit, heralding a big news story about That Wedding.

4 June. "Vodka, VIP passes and parties." What's all that about, eh? A feature on why twentysomething women "just wanna have fun", stoopid.

7 June. A model named Colette poses in an alluring off-the-shoulder number on Brighton beach. Readers wanting more of the same are advised to turn to pages 16 and 17 for a major piece on "Fun with a personal shopper".

9 June. "New York's latest ... the personal food trainer". Plus a photo of the paper's glamorous NY columnist Joanna Coles, who explores this fascinating sociological development.

11 June. Rather surprisingly, a humble arts review gets the front-page treatment. "TODAY. Baryshnikov's balletic Viagra." Even more surprisingly, the actual review of Baryshnikov's performance at Sadlers Wells makes no mention of Viagra, or even sex.

14 June. "Jerry Hall: 'No more playboys.'" La Hall grants a two-page interview to the Thunderer, in which she discusses such momentous issues as "dating, glamour and white pedal-pushers".

16 June. Another picture of Julia Roberts. This time the excuse is a news report on "the film world's top earners". Meanwhile the face of personal finance editor Anne Ashworth, looking lovelier than ever, illustrates a piece on how to beat cash-machine fraud.

17 June. "Judy Davis: what Woody taught me about sex."

22 June. "No sex please, we're in the movies."

23 June. "Nice legs, shame about the game. Lynne Truss on Agassi."

24 June. "The crisis in our universities. Anatole Kaletsky, page 22." Shome mishtake, shurely? "Shlock! Horror! Here comes *The Mummy*." That's more like it.

25 June. Hold the front page: "Scandal and the Sex in the City girl." Inside, the whole of page 5 is given over to the news that American author Candace Bushnell has a new boyfriend, British businessman Stephen Morris. Quite why this is a "scandal" is not explained.

30 June. Yet again, the irresistible features of personal finance editor Anne Ashworth smile out from the flannel panel, promoting her article on cheap mobile phone deals.

1 July. "The darling bud of LA." Cue Catherine Zeta-Jones displaying her cleavage.

2 July. "The golden age of sex and sensibility" is the come-on for a thoughtful feature by Amanda Craig asking "Why do we find 18th century women so sexy?"

3 July. The Good Friday peace agreement is on the verge of collapse, but *The Times*'s mind is elsewhere: "He's shagtastic! Meet Mike Myers, alias Austin Powers." Oh, and there's advice on "what to pack for the beach": not much, to judge by the bikini-clad lovely who graces the front page.

5 July. Another day, another bikini-wearing beauty under the masthead – this time in honour of a fashion spread on swimwear.

6 July. After all this frivolity, time to get serious: "Agony and ecstasy of Viagra wives."

8 July. Medical expert Dr Thomas Stuttaford reveals "the secret of kissable lips". As good a reason as any to have Julia Roberts on the front page once more.

9 July. How to entice readers towards a piece on Stanley Kubrick? Easy: print a large photo of a naked Nicole Kidman snogging Tom Cruise immediately under the masthead.

13 July. "Women's football takes off." *Takes off* – geddit?! The paper helpfully appends a photo of American footballer Brandi Chastain stripping off her shirt to reveal her bra.

14 July. Anne Ashworth, the Julia Roberts of personal finance correspondents, makes yet another front-page appearance, plugging a feature on "piggy banking for children". Alongside her is gorgeous pouting Joanna Coles again, revealing how "I took my hair to a party".

If this is the first draft of history, who needs second drafts?

Number crunchings

6%
PROPOSED increase in school spending this year

46%
PROPOSED increase in Chris Woodhead's earnings this year

TELECON

BRITISH TELECOM has decided to scrap the 80p flat rate for ringing international directory inquiries. In future, potential customers will be heavily penalised (at the rate of £1.10 a minute) for wanting to obtain numbers so that they can make telephone calls, thus boosting BT's profits.

Meanwhile, the people who answer the 153 service are simultaneously having their unsocial hours allowance cut by an average of £100 a month – thus, er, boosting BT's profits. They are not alone: "advisors" (i.e. the hapless slaves who ring BT customers while they're eating or watching TV to beg them to buy fax machines) are having their basic pay increased from £4.50 an hour to £5.50 – but their performance-related bonus payments cut from £4.50 an hour to just £2.50.

There is unlikely to be any complaint from the government at this shameless exploitation. In Ulster, for example, Mo Mowlam is so pleased with her local BT "call-centres" – notwithstanding their low pay, massive staff turnover and hideous architecture – that she has appointed her friend Lucy Woods, BT Northern Ireland's outgoing chief executive, to no fewer than three government bodies.

Tony Blair is even more reluctant to offend BT, not least because of its close links with BSkyB. Following the reluctant veto of Rupert Murdoch's Manchester United takeover, as well as Greg Dyke's appointment at the BBC, Blair desperately needs to repair relations with the Dirty Digger, so no criticism of BT will be entertained – even if it treats both its staff and customers like dirt.

Jason and the Argosnauts

IN THE TEAROOM

WILLIAM HAGUE's coolness over the Michael Ashcroft affair has agitated some of his more excitable colleagues, who want him to act decisively and ditch the embarrassing billionaire. But the Tory leader is right to play for time. This could be his first real opportunity to take a "new" Labour scalp.

If, as most central office staffers believe, the *Times*'s assault on Ashcroft is a deliberate political smear, then heads will have to roll if the conspirators can be traced. According to the rules, the working papers of previous administrations should never be seen by ministers. If you buy the smear theory, there must have been illicit collusion between politicians and officials to breach those rules. The Tories have indulged in a lot of windy rhetoric over the past two years about the corrupting politicisation of the civil service they claim has taken place under the Blair regime. Now they have a chance to prove their point.

The more gung-ho element at Smith Square want Ashcroft to turn the tables. He can well afford to put up a huge reward... £1m, say, for any investigative journalist who can discover who is behind the "smear". This would turn the focus of the story from Ashcroft's own affairs (which have, anyway, been well documented in the *Eye*) towards exposing Labour's dirty tricks department. Other wheezes under discussion include putting a private detective on the trail of *Times* hack Tom Baldwin, and offering "a cushion of protection" to civil servants willing to blow the whistle on their political masters.

All this makes Number 10 very nervous. The "A-Team" has been distracted by Northern Ireland recently. No one seems quite sure who switched on Peter Bradley (the Labour backbencher who has made most of the running on the Ashcroft story), who would not normally be expected to speak without explicit instructions from his pager. (Bradley has already come under the Tory microscope: researchers have noticed he is an alumnus of something called "Occidental College" in Los Angeles. Could there perhaps be some sinister connection with the late Armand Hammer?) This week chief of staff, Jonathan Powell will be checking with the silky Sherard Cowper-Coles from Robin Cook's office who has a direct line to his "friends" at Vauxhall Cross. They will want to establish whether anyone from the worlds of government, diplomacy or spookery has been "freelancing" and, if so, whether the Ashcroft scandal is likely to blow up in the prime minister's face.

'Urquhart'

THE Blair/Prescott feud, which exploded into the headlines following the Dear Leader's pep talk to his natural constituency – the British venture capitalist association – will soon produce casualties, but none will be from Blair's faction.

While Blair's aides acknowledged that the Dear Leader had gone seriously off message in departing from the script prepared earlier by Mr Campbell of the press department, they are delighted that Prescott's subsequent outburst reminded the PM of his duty to do in Prescott in the re-shuffle.

His first reshuffle was marked by the night of the long knives against cabinet supporters of the chancellor; this one will see Prescott's powerbase cut from under him. A swathe of working-class Prescott-doting northerners is likely to be axed, starting first with the oafish Alan Meale, a key Prescott confidant, who, alongside others such as George Mudie, may be replaced by fragrant Blair babes of a southern middle-class persuasion, such as Yvette Cooper and Ruth Kelly. The long planned downsizing of the mouth of the Humber is underway.

ONE casualty of Blair's last reshuffle was former chief whip Nick "Newcastle" Brown, a close ally of Chancellor Gordon Brown and therefore "not one of us" – as least as far as the faceless wonders in Downing Street were concerned.

As agriculture minister, Brown has picked up the pieces left behind by his predecessor, "Junket Jack" Cunningham. He finally ended the beef ban, and proved to farmers that it is possible to be a minister without jetting across the Atlantic first class in Concorde or re-decorating his departmental office at vast public expense. So why, as Fleet Street speculation on the second reshuffle reached fever pitch, was "Newcastle" Brown being tipped for Mo Mowlam's job as Northern Ireland secretary? Demented hacks in the Commons press gallery think they know why. Number 10 was simply testing the reaction of the legendary liberal minds of the Ulster Unionists to the possibility of a new secretary of state who might be gay. Depending upon their reaction, a solution could then be at hand for the Peter problem. In other words, get Mandelson back into the cabinet and into a job that no one else would touch with a barge pole.

LABOUR MP John Gunnell has announced that he will stand down as the member for Morley and Rothwell at the next general election.

The 65-year-old former leader of West Yorkshire county council said the time had come to stop "burning the candle at both ends". At least he will now be able to spend more time with his directorships, where his paid roles on the boards of venture capital and consultancy companies Yorkshire Enterprise Ltd and York Trust Ltd have raised eyebrows among constituents, who were under the impression they had a full-time MP.

"WEE" ERNIE ROSS was recently obliged to apologise to the House of Commons for leaking details of a select committee investigation into the arms to Sierra Leone affair to foreign secretary, Robin Cook.

Ernie has reason to feel aggrieved, because a) unlike him, Cook hasn't been obliged to grovel before the Commons, and b) because the *Grauniad* still describes him as the "Left wing MP for Dundee", thus failing to appreciate Ernie's selfless graft in shafting all of his erstwhile comrades over the past decade.

Sadly, worse is still to come, for Ernie's former comrades have since spotted another earnest Blairite who is keen to usurp his position as chief nark to the whips' office. Slipping out of the shadows is one Jim Murphy, the new boy who snatched the marginal Eastwood from the Tories at the last election. Sadly for Murphy, however, it seems likely that all of his efforts will be in vain. Labour's rules say that MPs have to stand and fight in their own constituencies and cannot join a chicken run to a safer seat. Murphy's stint in Parliament is likely to be short and unlamented.

THE NEW chief secretary to the treasury, Alan Milburn, has been busy delighting his friends with his new grasp of treasury orthodoxy.

"The modern treasury has to be not just a ministry for economic stability but an engine for economic and social renewal," Milburn sagely explained to nodding hacks. This is all a far cry from those heady days in which the open-toed sandal-wearing Alan was a big cheese in CND – and a further cry still from Alan's revolutionary socialist dalliances as a Darlington Trotskyite.

OFFICERS in the Islington North Labour party – home to bearded Fenian MP, Jeremy Corbyn – are scratching their heads at a sudden and inexplicable surge in membership applications to join the local party.

Could this be in anyway related to the coming round of selection contests, in which Labour party members who turn up to ward nominating meetings, subsequently have the right to select – or in the case of Corbyn – de-select their MP?

***SPECTATOR* readers were recently given an account of an astonishing conversation which passed between Penny Mortimer – wife of pro-hunting playwright, John Mortimer, and a grisly "new" Labour apparatchik, who she failed to name.**

Mortimer revealed that she had been seated next to the "new" Labour boy at a sophisticated dinner party, which coincided with Labour back-bencher, Michael Foster's attempt at a private members bill to outlaw fox hunting. Having lambasted Penny Mortimer for "brainwashing" her husband into supporting the pro-hunting campaign, the apparatchik tried a different tack. "He's getting very old, isn't he?" he inquired charmlessly. To which Penny Mortimer spluttered: "Actually he's 75. He is rather dickey in the leg department but I can assure you that his brain is working on full throttle. In fact I think his attitude to a lot of things is much younger than mine." Unperturbed, the hideous creature lunged again. "So why do you stay with him? Is it love or duty?" So what is the identity of this crass fellow, an obvious dropout from life's charm school? Step forward Phillip Gould, egregious spin-doctor, confidant of Blair and Mandy and author of the abysmal tome *The Unfinished Revolution*.

THE WHOLE-HEARTED support given by the ministry of defence to "new" labour's ethical foreign policy will be shown in September when it backs Britain's biggest ever arms trade fair.

Three previous exhibitions have been merged into the defence systems and equipment international show (DSEI) taking place in London's Docklands and on MoD land in Chertsey, Surrey, between 14-17 September. The list of delegates is secret, but it is expected to be on similar lines to those of the DSEI's forerunners.

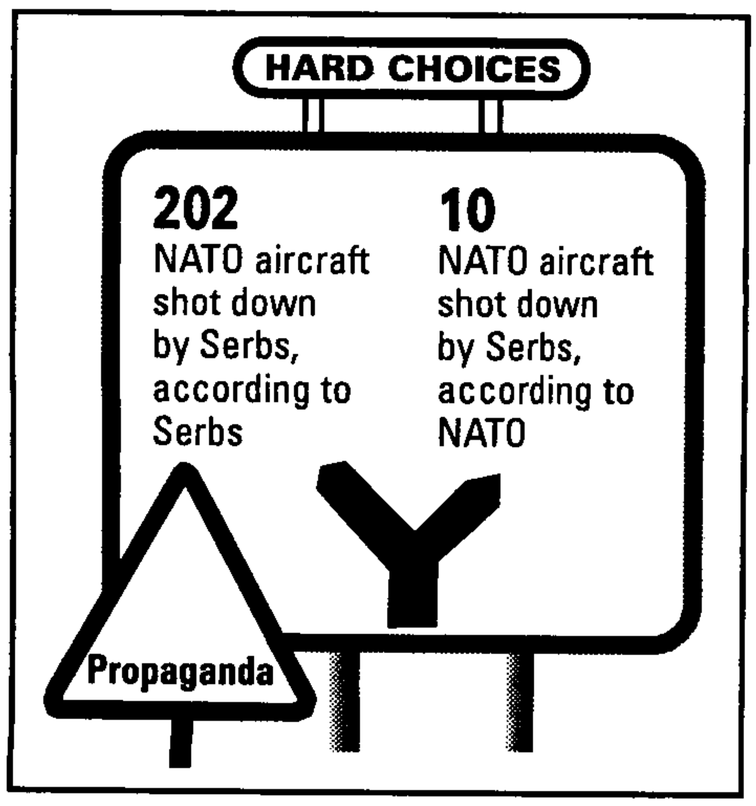
At the Royal Navy and British Army Equipment Exhibition (RNBAEE) in 1997 the Turkish defence minister Ismet Sezgin met George Robertson, who will be opening DSEI. Shortly afterwards British Aerospace sold 500,000 Heckler and Koch (HK33) assault rifles to the Turkish army. All in line, no doubt, with Robin Cook's foreign office mission statement of July 1998 which said arms export licences would be refused if "there is a clearly identifiable risk the proposed export might be used for internal repression" – notwithstanding Turkey's track record of aggression against its Kurdish population.

Hunting Engineering was another of the delegates at the 1997 RNBAEE. Their catalogue boasted of the "BL755 general purpose and anti-armour cluster weapon with target proximity sensor".

"An effective answer to the battlefield threat", read the puff. "Delivers 147 shaped-charge fragmenting bomblets with devastating effectiveness." Devastating indeed: once dropped these bomblets can, like landmines, lie dormant on the ground until someone treads on them.

The foreign office admits the 30 per cent failure rate of cluster bombs involves a "minuscule risk". Not minuscule enough to prevent the deaths of two Gurkha soldiers on 21 June during an operation to clear about 90 unexploded cluster bombs piled behind a school in Kosovo.

'Backbiter'



WELSH LEAKS

ONE of the first motions passed by the Welsh assembly on 14 July set assembly members' (AMs) expenses. The salaries allowance for AMs' staff has risen from £27,000 to £30,000, bringing it roughly into line with Northern Ireland, although still lower than Scotland at £36,000 and Westminster at £50,264. The package, which also includes AMs' car mileage allowance of 40p for the first 4,000 miles and up to £10,000 accommodation allowance for AMs living outside Glamorgan and Gwent, is estimated to cost £500,000 a year.

It is perhaps only fair to bring Wales closer to Scotland and Northern Ireland, but what really miffs some AMs is that while first secretary Alun Michael's salary is on a par with other first ministers at £64,308, on top of his Westminster wage, ordinary AMs receive only £34,308 compared to £38,000 in Northern Ireland, £40,092 in Scotland and £47,008 at Westminster.

Plaid Cymru leader Dafydd Wigley is eligible for an extra £33,360 as head of the largest opposition party. The Lib Dems have dubbed him "Dafydd ab Stain" and asked why the Welsh nationalists have been granted an equivalent status to the opposition in Westminster when they seem to side with Labour on every important issue.

Meanwhile Welsh Tories are up in arms about the symbolic status of the flags flying outside the assembly building in Cardiff. The Red Dragon, the Union Jack and the European stars were all flying at one stage, but at the start of July the red white and blue mysteriously disappeared.

When Tory leader in Wales Rod Richards and his deputy David Davies went to see the presiding officer Dafydd Elis-Thomas to ask what was going on he admitted he was not sure. The assembly press office told the *Eye* they know nothing about it, "because it is a matter for Buckingham Palace". The Tories, however, are muttering about a stealthy move towards Plaid Cymru's vision of an independent Wales in a federal Europe.

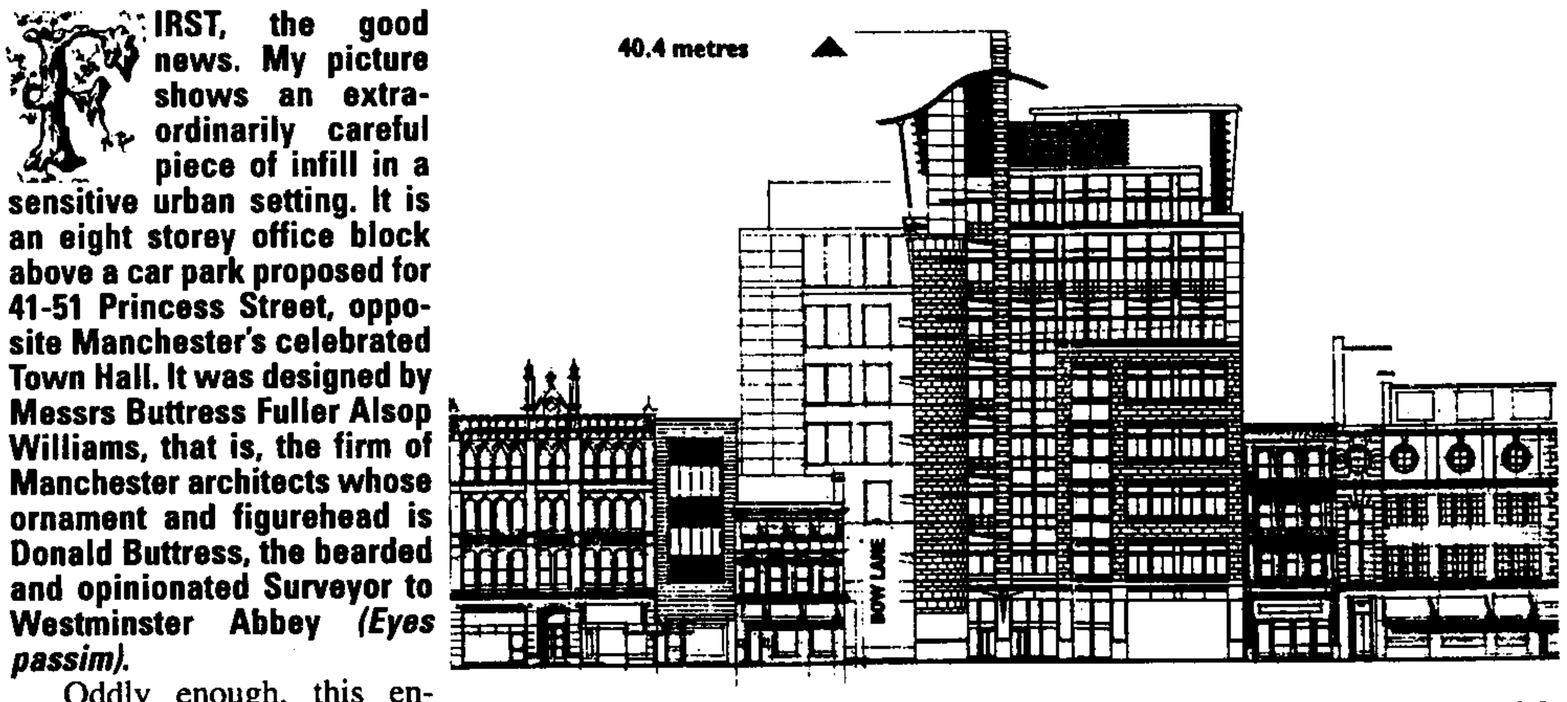
TUC NEWS

IF THE Trades Unions Congress looks more like Glastonbury this year, do not be fooled. It is all makeover.

The TUC has finally come alive to telegenics and is so concerned by the uninspiring annual spectacle of row upon row of lumbering sauropods, that this year it intends to break their ranks with bright young things dotted around the delegate hall.

Organisers have written to all the unions urging them to try and find young delegates for this year's session at Brighton in September. And if that fails they recommend bringing along young union members as visitors. Not only will the usual £15 visitors' fees be waived, the pretty fledglings will also be allowed to sit in the usually sacrosanct delegates' hall.

"It's a pretty sad state of affairs," said one long-in-the-tooth activist "You can bet your life, they'll all be in the front rows for the cameras."



NOOKS and CORNERS

FIRST, the good news. My picture shows an extraordinarily careful piece of infill in a sensitive urban setting. It is an eight storey office block above a car park proposed for 41-51 Princess Street, opposite Manchester's celebrated Town Hall. It was designed by Messrs Buttress Fuller Alsop Williams, that is, the firm of Manchester architects whose ornament and figurehead is Donald Buttress, the bearded and opinionated Surveyor to Westminster Abbey *(Eyes passim).*

Oddly enough, this enhancement was opposed by the Manchester civic society, among others, and went to public inquiry. Odder still, the secretary of state for the environment, transport and the regions has just endorsed his inspector's conclusion that the building was not of suitable quality for the site, would damage the setting of Waterhouse's Town Hall and its neighbours and that it should be refused planning permission, listed building consent and conservation area consent. Hurrah!

NOW, the bad news. Queensberry House, or No. 64 Canongate in Edinburgh, stands at the bottom end of the Royal Mile and is one of the buildings that contributes to the unique, unaffected setting of the palace of Holyroodhouse. Recently it has been a hospital but once it was "the great mansion" and very grand. Begun in 1681 with James Smith as mason, it was bought by the first Duke of Queensberry in 1686. After the Union, its status fell and it was converted into flats. Then, in about 1803, it was made into a barracks and a whole floor added. In 1832 it became a House of Refuge and, since then, serving humble but worthy functions, Queensberry House has minded its own business and modestly formed part of the rich architectural heritage of what James Pryde called "the most romantic city in the world".

Until now. This unfortunate listed building now finds itself right next to the site opposite Holyroodhouse imperiously chosen by Donald Dewar, when Scottish Secretary, for the exciting new building for the Scottish Parliament. So, instead of humble buildings defining the Royal Mile, Queensberry House will have as its neighbour the complex of "upturned boats" which has now evolved into a series of wonky towers designed by Enric Miralles, the Barcelona architect selected in the carefully managed architectural competition staged by Mr Dewar. So what does Mr Miralles think of Queensberry House? Naturally he admires it: indeed, he wants to incorporate it into his vision. The great mansion can, in fact, now serve a useful purpose in the democratic age into which it has somehow managed to survive, for it finds itself conveniently sited between the parliament chamber and the block of offices designed to house the hordes of civil servants that the devolved Scotland is generating.

In fact, Queensberry House will now become a sort of entrance lobby, or corridor – there are worse fates, I suppose – while the upper floors can house yet more civil servants. And to accommodate these functions it will – naturally – have to be gutted. It lost many of its sumptuous interior fittings when it was converted into a barracks. But the building remains, in essence, a grand old mansion and could be restored. Indeed, recent investigation has revealed it to be extremely interesting. Under the raised roof the remains have been found of a belvedere which once must have stood above the original French mansard roof "in the style of the palace of Versailles".

All this could conceivably be recovered. While one might not wish for Queensberry House to become an answer to Disneyland, like that other former barracks the Great Hall of Stirling Castle after recent treatment by Historic Scotland, there is surely a serious argument for either repairing the existing house as it stands or restoring its original 17th century appearance. After all, a great town house built in the capital before the Act of Union would surely be something to cherish in a devolved Scotland rediscovering its past. But no. While its surviving innards are to be gutted, the roof is to be covered with pantiles – a building material totally alien in Edinburgh. Perhaps this is a tactful reference to Catalonia, or the Costa Brava. Does anyone in Edinburgh care?

'Piloti'

HOW EUROPE WORKS

WHEN two EU member states are hell bent on striking a less than admirable deal they announce a restricted session, as did German environment minister Jürgen Trittin at the recent council of ministers meeting in Luxembourg.

Trittin had promised he would not oppose measures to cut the levels of scrap from cars that is not recycled, which constitutes 10 percent of hazardous waste in Europe. But under pressure from Chancellor Gerhard Schröder he struck a deal with Michael Meacher to delay the proposals.

Schröder, who used to sit on Volkswagen's supervisory board, is swayed by the car industry which is firmly opposed to the "end-of-life" vehicles directive, because it fears it will end up footing the bill.

Meacher admitted Tony Blair ordered him to speak against the directive in return for German support for Britain's opposition to a proposal for auction houses to pay artists multiple royalties on the resale of their works in the EU – obviously a far superior cause by any set of values.

Not the sort of stuff you want leaked to the press. Unfortunately for Trittin and Meacher, although hacks had departed they had left a TV camera rolling – which broadcast these u-turns (and the furious reactions of other ministers) to assembled reporters in the press room.

O·B·N

Tony Blair sets the best possible example. I have known 10 prime ministers and he has easily the best manners of any of them. Whatever service you perform for him is invariably rewarded by a handwritten letter promptly dispatched and couched in the most gracious language. He is kind and thoughtful and polite to all, high and low. And there is nothing cloying about his courtesy either: it springs from the heart. His wife, unlike her cheeky sister – though I like her too, for different reasons – is herself a great lady, and their three children are models of good manners. (The Prime Minister says this is not always so, but for once I do not credit him).

PAUL JOHNSON
Spectator

Nominated by Roger Bingham.

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

TV

Ally McBeal (Channel 4)

AT LAST the waiting is over. The second series of *Ally McBeal* has started on Channel 4, and the nation is united in humble gratitude. Something worth watching! Something we can talk about at work the following day! Someone we can all agree needs a damn good meal inside her, preferably involving pork pies!

Channel 4, perhaps sensibly, has made the most of this rare opportunity. Unable to make any watchable drama series of its own, the Station That Brought You *Countdown* has honoured its purchase with a publicity offensive that wouldn't have shamed *Star Wars*, backed up with an exclusive behind-the-scenes documentary broadcast in the hour before the first episode.

Would any British series receive such attention? Of course not. Even if our own programmes were good enough, they still wouldn't be cool enough. Just being American makes *Ally McBeal* cool enough, and its obvious attributes have raised it to Full Cult Status. Idiots who worry what other people are thinking all the time – even those who haven't risen to senior positions in the television industry – can happily admit to liking *Ally* without exciting scorn or incomprehension. It's smart, it's clever, it's just about the most successful show on American TV. It's a risk-free preference. No wonder Michael Jackson is so mad about it.

The key, as always with television drama, is in the writing. By any standards *Ally McBeal* is a fantastically tight piece of work, as crisp as a new £20 banknote and rather more obviously the real thing. The speed of the repartee can be dazzling, and many of the funniest moments are also the most surprising: little throwaway gags that are gone before you noticed them but which you are still laughing at a day or two later. It's a show that treats you like an adult: you have to pay attention to take in all the jokes. There's no fear of failure here, merely a delight in what's possible – and in television, if you have the imagination, almost anything is possible.

Some of the show's cultural assumptions, it's true, may rankle with British audiences. Do we really care about these brash Americans in suits? These women who wear too much make-up and moan incessantly about their love lives? These halfwits and villains suing each other over trifles? These grim yuppies – an old word but appropriate in the circumstances – who hang out in that grim yuppie bar, with that dull singer who warbles old Motown songs to a bland country-rock beat? Are these things to which we are all secretly supposed to aspire?

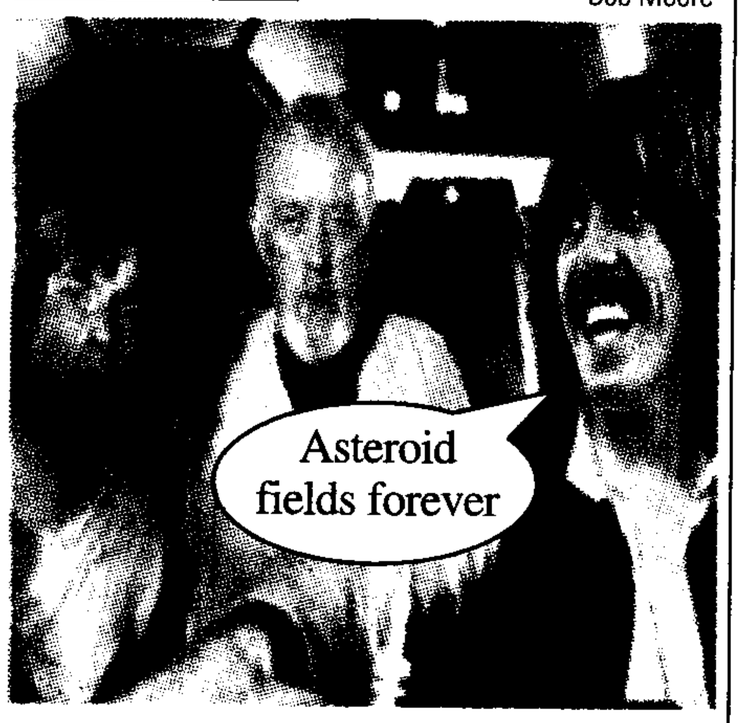
And then, more specifically, there is the Calista Flockhart problem. Small, pert, submissive and frighteningly underfed, her Ally McBeal is difficult for some viewers to sympathise with. A diet that included food might be one answer, although several female viewers within Couch Potato's circle have suggested "a good slap". Ever shorter skirts reveal ever knobblier knees, while eyes that were already goggly now threaten to move on to their own series, probably for more money. No one is fat in *Ally McBeal*, but no one is as frighteningly unfat as this.

As with most series worth watching, though, it's the people who watch it who probably complain the most. (Do all expensive American lawyers have unisex loos? Do any of them at all?) The quality of the writing in *Ally McBeal* outweighs most other considerations, especially for anyone who has ever watched *Badger*. So why does C4 broadcast the show in a marginal slot (10pm) in the middle of summer? Why doesn't ITV snap it up? Or BBC1? Why isn't everyone watching it? Because, according to virtually everyone you'll meet in television these days, it's just too clever for the mass audience. They wouldn't get it. They wouldn't watch it. "Where are the vets?" they would cry. The bad-tempered detectives? Where is David Jason? Take this rubbish away! Bring us David Jason!

'Couch Potato'

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore



George Harrison Ford

RADIO SPECIAL

***Test Match Special*, already wounded by the loss of this winter's England cricket tour of South Africa to Talk Radio, has suffered two further body blows.**

Talk Radio has now snapped-up the exclusive rights to England's next two winter outings – Pakistan and Sri Lanka in 2000-1 and India and New Zealand the following winter. As already reported (*Eye* 978) the BBC lost the South Africa tour by negotiating with an agent while Talk Radio were talking directly to the South African Cricket Board. Proving that they learnt nothing from that debacle the BBC was again in gentlemanly talks with third parties while Talk Radio's men were handing over cheques directly to the host cricketing authorities.

Talk Radio's eagerness to buy these two relatively unattractive cricket tours is designed to show the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) that it is serious about the game. The BBC's current contract with the ECB for home test matches expires after next summer's visit by the West Indies and Zimbabwe, and Kelvin MacKenzie's young network has made no secret of its wish to become the new home of ball-by-ball commentary.

It all means the end for *TMS* as we know it. Aware that the ECB is keen to modernise cricket's image – hence the selling of TV rights to Channel 4 and Sky – the boys in the BBC's sports department are preparing to shake-up *TMS* next summer in a last-ditch attempt to show the ECB that they can be as modern as it takes.

Mike Miller, the BBC's controller of sport, is instigating a review of the current *TMS* output and will closely follow Talk Radio's innovations this winter to see what works. He knows that the ECB won't want to associate cricket with a stuffy BBC product if Talk Radio's proposed tabloid approach brings in younger listeners. There is certainly likely to be more "listener participation" (aka phone-ins) and fewer posh accents in evidence. Internal BBC negotiations are underway to give *TMS* a complete run from 10.45am to 7pm next year, without interruptions for the *Shipping Forecast* and *The World at One*. Intervals and rain breaks would be filled with quizzes, discussions, phone-ins and interviews with players and spectators.

One change is inevitable: if *TMS* survives then a woman will be part of the new-look commentary team. The popularity of Barbadian commentator Donna Simmons during the World Cup took the BBC by surprise. They are now trying to secure her presence in the box next summer as the overseas guest commentator. But after that?

Step forward Sybil Ruscoe. The toothy, chatty cricket-nut recently left Radio 5 Live after five years and landed a job with Channel 4 cricket. BBC officials, kicking themselves for letting her slip through their fingers, are preparing to charm Sybil back into the arms of Auntie. With the ever-popular Jonathan Agnew presiding over commentary and Ruscoe let loose as a presenter/interviewer/roving reporter, the BBC think they may have found the dream ticket to beat off Talk Radio's challenge.

STAR SECRETS
AND THE SECRET IS...
THAT THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE SO DESPERATE TO GET ON TV...
THEY'RE PREPARED TO PRESENT SHOWS LIKE THIS
STAR SECRE
KenPyne

Plugged In

"*Star Wars* has been voted the best movie of all time in a massive poll of film fans..."

***The Sun* (prop. R. Murdoch) on Twentieth Century Fox's *Star Wars* (prop. R. Murdoch) being voted top film by Sky (prop R. Murdoch) viewers.**

"To my mind, Sky Premier's Millennium Movies Poll of the top 100 is as honest about our cinemagoing habits as it gets ...The original *Star Wars* surprised few by emerging the clear winner, polling 35 percent of the votes. It beat *Titanic*, the most expensive film ever made, into second place."

James Christopher and Carol Midgely comment on the placings of two films made by Rupert Murdoch's Fox company in a poll on Rupert Murdoch's Sky TV channel, in Rupert Murdoch's newspaper *The Times*.

Nominated by Chris Denham.

An occasional column devoted to cross-media plugs masquerading as news.

MEDIA NEWS

NOW that the fighting in Kosovo is over (sort of), BBC staff are nominating their candidates for campaign medals – and particularly for the coveted award of Most Unpopular Correspondent.

An early front-runner is John Simpson, who, according to the *Guardian,* sent 157 despatches to the BBC on his busiest day. But colleagues say the newsroom's "traffic reports" reveal that he filed less than that in the whole three months. Some were also impressed by his *coup* in getting a visa for his wife instead of for a producer or correspondent who might have been more willing to work for outlets other than *The Nine O'Clock News* and *Simpson's World.*

ITN has also suffered some collateral damage in the Kosovan conflict: one of its shiny new £350,000 satellite uplink trucks has been impounded.

The vehicle was returning to the UK after its tour of duty on Kosovo, and was meant to travel through Albania and Greece, and thence by ferry to Italy and home. But the two engineers sharing the driving decided it would be quicker to go via Montenegro, Croatia and Central Europe.

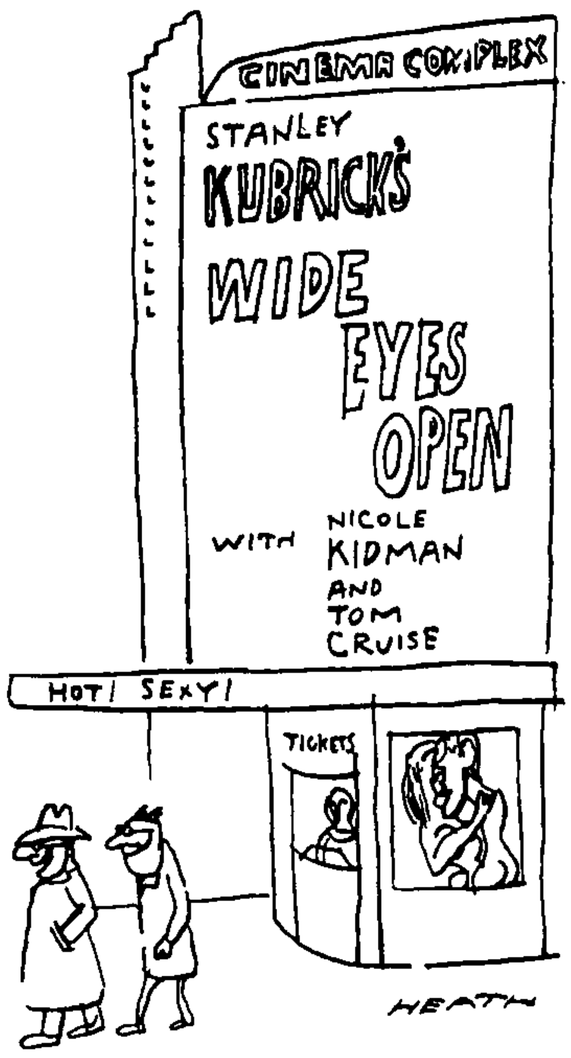
Unfortunately they were stopped just before the Croatian border and thrown in the slammer. Though ITN managed to get the hapless pair out of jail, the satellite truck was left behind, no doubt ready to be painted in Serb TV livery.

ITN bosses are now awaiting a huge bill from the company which leased it the truck – and treble embarrassments all round.

***PRIVATE EYE* is not the only publication to have been deluged with letters for daring to criticise BBC World (*Eye* 978).**

A word of dissent in the *Independent* at the end of last month was enough to provoke an outraged missive from one Rick Thompson. "BBC World Television... has become one of Britain's greatest assets abroad," he wrote. "I was in Croatia earlier this month, where BBC World was watched avidly by most people I spoke to, and was much preferred to CNN."

Thompson signed himself off as the director of T-Media consultancy and a visiting professor in broadcast journalism in Birmingham. He did, however, neglect to point out his previous employment – as head of newsgathering for BBC world service television and radio, which ended in 1996 when the two services were separated and BBC World in its current incarnation set up. Neither did Thompson point out that one of T-Media consultancy's biggest clients is... BBC World, or that it was they who sent him to Croatia last month to train a group of local TV journalists, who are presumably the "avid viewers" to whom his letter refers.



"Sometimes I fantasise about Nicole Kidman with her clothes on"

LUVVIES

"The whole thing is so personal that it is very hard to talk about the film [*Eyes Wide Shut*] without getting upset. Emotionally I am very connected to it ... we both decided we were basically going to get lost in this world for a year and a half, and that's what we did."

NICOLE KIDMAN
Daily Telegraph

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

"ONLY an accident of birth makes Prince Edward someone in the world", trumpeted the *Sun* on 12 July, days after it had lined up with everyone else to fawn over his wedding.

The news that the youngest Windsor was planning to charge for a lecture on the restoration of Windsor castle sent the paper into paroxysms of moral outrage. "If his mother wasn't the Queen, he would be a third-rate TV producer of little note. That is why it is so disgraceful for him to cash in on the family name... He's got a right cheek," a leader thundered.

Presumably editor David Yelland will be pointing this out to his boss Rupert Murdoch, and to his fragrant daughter Elisabeth, who happens to be something of a third-rate TV producer herself, heading her father's Sky networks. She outlined her vision of the future of the industry in the keynote worldview address at last year's Edinburgh television festival, a ticket-only event.

HENRY KISSINGER'S swift and wordless departure from the *Start the Week* studio after his spat with Jeremy Paxman has nothing on the put-down techniques employed by his interrogator.

Paxo made short shrift with one *Eye* reader who e-mailed him at the BBC to complain at his treatment of the great peacemaker. Came the response: "I think you ought to know that some boring, foul-mouthed, half-wit is using your e-mail address to send insulting messages to people."

THE despondency of staff at BBC Scotland has deepened with the news that Alistair "Towser" Moffat is the front-runner to become part-time chairman of the Scottish Broadcasting Council. The holder automatically joins the BBC board of governors as Scottish representative.

Moffat was until recently managing director of Scottish Television Enterprises, an outfit he created seven years ago to sell the company's programmes around the world. However, possibly on account of the doleful quality of the goods on offer, STE lost money and Moffat was eased out – or, as it was more delicately put, "indicated he wanted to return to programme-making". But his current duties are not so onerous as to prevent him taking on the bizarre new job of "Scottish editor" for Geoffrey Robinson's *New Statesman.*

Before reaching a decision, the panel might care to glance at Moffat's book *Remembering Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, a tie-in with an STV programme, which led to an acrimonious and exceedingly expensive lawsuit with Glasgow University because of the author's lofty indifference to the laws of copyright. When the book eventually appeared, part of the settlement was that the following apology be affixed to the inside cover of every copy.

"The passages in this book entitled 'The Chronacle' [sic] form part of a series of letters gifted and subsequently bequeathed to the University of Glasgow by Hamish Davidson. These letters were given on the condition that they are not to be published in any way and are only to be made available for purposes of research. In full knowledge of this condition, the author Alistair Moffat published extensive quotations contrary to the wishes of the university which had been conveyed to him..."

Is this man really suited to go on the BBC board of governors? Of course he is: after all, Gordon Brown is godfather to one of the Moffat sprogs.

AD NAUSEAM

A RECENT edition of *Campaign*, the ad industry magazine, mentions a dramatic new development in the world of promotions – apples for school-kids' lunch boxes now feature the likes of Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck on their tiny labels.

The joint venture between Cartoon Network and Enza apples is the "Media Choice" of Louise Gelhorn, director of the Concord poster company.

As it happens, Concord and Cartoon Network are both clients of the Propeller Group – whose boss Martin Loat is the live-in partner of *Campaign*'s media editor, Claire Beale.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

PROPERTY PRICES HAVE GONE BANANAS! MY FLAT'S UP 20,000 ON LAST YEAR...
WE COULD BUY A WELSH CATHEDRAL FOR THE PRICE OF OUR CONVERTED WAREHOUSE
WE MADE 80,000!
WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH MAX?
MAX RENTS
THE HORROR THE HORROR

DOING THE ROUNDS

Heart Surgery Today

AS THE Bristol heart inquiry continues its retrospective analysis of what went wrong between 1984 and 1995, those considering having heart surgery today might reasonably ask what safeguards are in place to ensure they get the "first class service" promised by health secretary Frank Dobson two years ago.

There are currently 35 units performing cardiac surgery in the UK. Just one of them publishes results for both adult and child surgery on the internet – Bristol (see www.ubht.org.uk). The child surgery results are mercifully excellent, thanks to the appointment of surgeon Ash Pawade, several specialist intensivists and the reorganisation of the service onto a single site. The spirit of openness now evident in Bristol, however, is by no means universal. A survey by Channel 4's Dispatches earlier this year discovered that only a handful of units would release their figures to the public, and none (other than Bristol) on a named surgeon basis. So how can we accept any assurance that "a Bristol" isn't happening elsewhere?

The debate as to whether individual surgeons, or rather surgical teams, should release their results is highly controversial. In Bristol it was inevitable, partly because of political circumstance but mainly because Mr Pawade was until recently the only specialist paediatric heart surgeon in Bristol, so it was obvious he was behind the figures. Doing this for every heart surgeon raises problems because half, by definition, will be "below average" – and who wants a below average heart surgeon? It also requires careful adjustment for case-mix, so surgeons aren't penalised for accepting the sickest patients requiring the most complex surgery. These patients are most likely to die, but also have most to gain from surgery.

The widespread publication of individual surgeons' figures may be some way off (although there is nothing to stop anyone asking for them in person) but the society of cardiothoracic surgeons (SCTS) has made good progress in checking the quality of the overall service. In 1997-1998 they used two paediatric operations as markers – "simple" aortic coarctation and ventriculoseptal defect – to assess the performance of the 27 surgeons performing each one. In 1997-8, there was just one death out of 238 in the first category, and two deaths in 302 in the second. This year, the list of marker operations will be extended to seven and will hopefully include more complex procedures.

All this is done anonymously, as is the SCTS's audit of adult heart surgery, so although the data is available to the public, you can't identify individual units from it. And for 1997-1998, 10 of the 35 units didn't even submit audit figures to the database at all. The reasons for this are complex – in some cases, the trust itself is reluctant to make the investment in the software and personnel training needed to collect the data. The Bristol team has proved that these costs are in fact relatively small. It may also be that cardiac surgery is still full of dinosaurs who don't feel they should open up their performance to outside scrutiny.

The fact that 30 percent of the UK's heart surgery units can't or won't submit data even for anonymous audit is deeply worrying, but the SCTS has at least had the balls to name them in a public report (the national adult cardiac surgical database report 1998). Those who were unable to contribute to the 1997-98 audit include Plymouth's Derriford hospital, Sheffield's Northern General, Southampton General, North Staffordshire Royal Infirmary in Stoke-on-Trent, London's Royal Hospitals Trust, Oxford Heart Centre, Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, Belfast's Royal Victoria Infirmary and both the Royal Infirmary and Western Infirmary in Glasgow.

M.D.

● PS: THANKS AGAIN to our whistle-blower. We have been assured by the hospital in question that a thorough investigation is underway, headed by an outside expert in the field. We have also been promised a copy of the findings, when he reports.

SIGNAL FAILURES

Focus on the feeding frenzy

RAIL PRIVATISATION is widely thought to be one of the greatest policy disasters of the 1990s, but the latest annual reports show the Tories succeeded in their aim of creating a feeding frenzy around the corpse of British Rail.

In 1998-99 numerous companies extracted profits from a business which until recently ran at a modest annual loss. First in the queue was Railtrack, still licensed to levy hefty track charges despite having cut back on asset renewal to help create a profit of £428m (up 8 percent). Railtrack cut the delays it caused by 2 percent, far short of its 7.5 percent target, but its directors still got bonuses for good performance. Chief executive Gerald Corbett (who accused train operators of causing too many delays and failing to invest) got £61,000 on top of his £335,000 salary. A bonus of £52,000 should help make ends meet at the household of finance director Norman Broadhurst, who earns a mere £200,000 per annum.

The rolling-stock companies were next at the trough. Stagecoach's Porterbrook made £140m profit (up £10m), much of it from leasing clapped-out trains at inflated prices. These trains are so cheap to provide that more than half the rental fee is clear profit. Profits leaped by 62 percent at Stagecoach's South West Trains franchise, where almost half the £63m subsidy for the year went as profit.

Stagecoach also gained £9m from its stake in Virgin Trains, which declared a surplus of £28m (double last year's figure). Even Prism Rail, which admitted its Wales and West and Cardiff Railway franchises were short of cash, took its pound of flesh – a £10m profit. The profit motive has also spread to what were back-room departments of BR: Racal Electronics, which runs the railway's telephones, declared a profit of £81m.

Also feeding off BR's remains is the government. While professing to want a massive increase in rail usage, it quietly pocketed £15m in contract payments from Thameslink and Gatwick Express and a £1.2m net gain from the fines and bonuses for bad and good train performance. There was apparently enough fat in the network for overall subsidies to drop by £250m, compared with 1997-98, while company profits remained buoyant.

Last in the queue – the ones who had to go hungry – were the customers. The train watchdog received 27 percent more complaints from passengers than in the previous year. More than 4,000 complained about punctuality – a 38 percent rise that mirrored the 32 percent increase in delays caused by (profitable) train operators. As profits soared, punctuality and reliability on South West Trains worsened to the extent it was fined £3.7m by the government.

Passengers in many areas are increasingly fed up with overcrowding, but there is only loose change left in the kitty for extra trains and tracks. There is no money to electrify any lines, re-staff stations or install the train protection system that might well have prevented last month's crash in Cheshire, and precious little cash to renew decayed signal cables, reduce fares and replace the hundreds of carriages identified as safety risks 10 years ago.

All this has followed the Tories' script to the letter.

'Dr B. Ching'

DOWN ON THE FARM

THE US is threatening a trade war over four separate items where the European Union is resisting free trade: hormone-treated beef, the dairy hormone BST, genetically modified crops and where we should buy our bananas.

In a bizarre twist, the EU is even proposing to pay compensation to the US for banning beef which it would not allow to be produced in Europe.

The National Farmers Union, however, has chosen to pretend this is not happening. "British farmers," it says sweetly, "want to compete freely and fairly on the world market." Compete with the revolting standards of animal husbandry in the US? With wage levels in South America? With pesticide use Egyptian style? Really?

What the NFU doublespeak actually means is that it wants access to world markets – but only if cushioned by massive direct aid and given suitable protection from incoming products. In other words, protectionism!

Protectionism allows a country to strike a deal with

its farmers over how it wants its food produced. But what is the point of the UK – or the EU – agonising over climate-change levies or the size of chicken cages, if this simply shifts production to less concerned areas?

What is not a credible policy is the NFU's unswerving devotion to agricultural free trade even in the EU, far less in the rest of the world.

'Gumboot'

Down on the Fish Farm

VIRTUALLY the entire seaboard of the West Highlands and Islands of Scotland, an area of 9,000 sq miles, was closed to scallop fishing on 9 July by the Scottish Executive, formerly the Scottish Office, "...because of a build-up of naturally occurring amnesic shellfish poisoning (ASP) toxins". This is the largest closure order ever made, anywhere in the world, in connection with an ASP outbreak. It is a disaster for shellfish fishermen, who rely on clean water to produce scallops, mussels, oysters and other seafood products.

J M Davies, deputy director at the government marine laboratory in Aberdeen, insists that there is no evidence to show that ASP – or other related toxic incidents, such as diarrhetic shellfish poisoning (DSP) and paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) – has anything to do with fish farms. He is right that there is no evidence because the marine lab has carried out almost no research to establish whether or not there is a link. Much easier to blame the outbreaks on "naturally occurring algal blooms".

But toxic algal blooms occur near fish farms, where the Scottish environment protection agency (Sepa) allows farmers to dump upwards of 9,000 tonnes of untreated ammonia into the sea each year. Hardly a "naturally occurring" event. Anyone who has changed a baby's nappy will be well aware of the pong of ammonia. What effect does 9,000 tonnes of it have on shellfish?

As the map shows, the outbreak is confined to the West Highlands, where all but two sea lochs are blighted by salmon farms. The most significant "black hole" is the one in block H6, on the west coast of the Island of Lewis. There is no outbreak either to the north or to the south of this site. What makes H6 different from adjacent waters? H6 is Loch Roag, the most intensively farmed salmon loch in Europe.

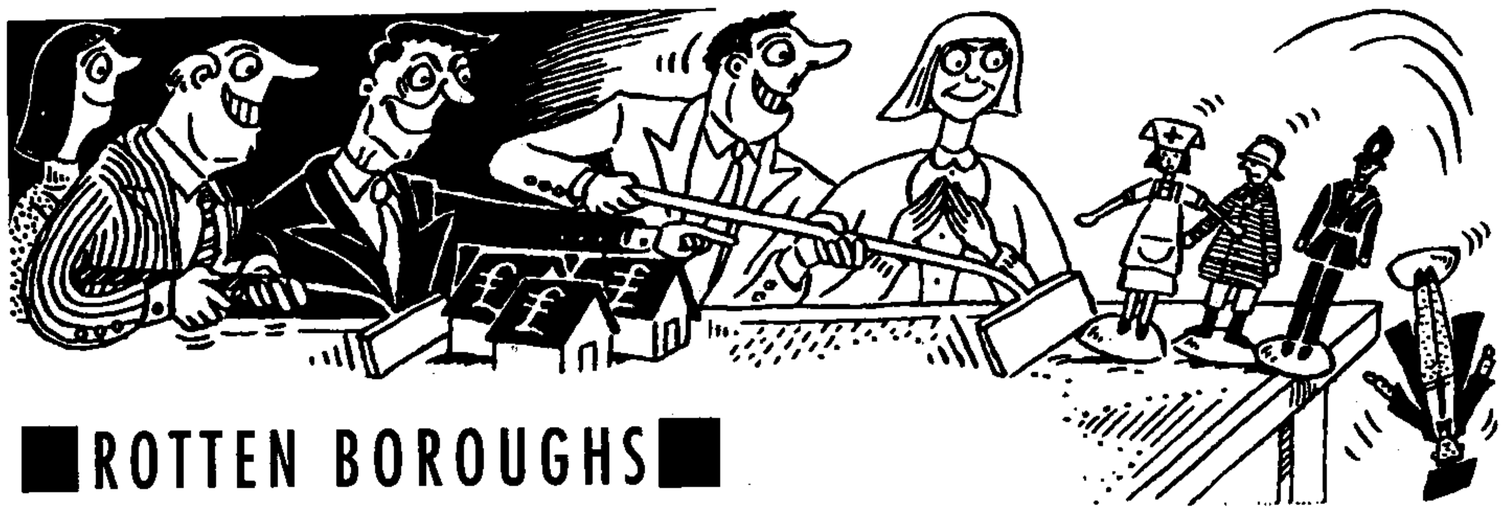
ASP is nasty. It "eats" holes in the human brain. There is no antidote. More than 100 people were affected by an ASP outbreak in Canada in 1987, where it was first identified. It appeared in Scottish waters, in Shetland, in 1996. In London, in July 1998, 49 restaurant diners were treated for nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea 30 minutes after eating mussels collected from salmon cages in Loch Seaforth, to the south of Loch Roag. DSP, a potent tumour promoter, was the culprit.

In Loch Broadford in the Island of Skye, previously closed because of ASP, a pod of whales was spotted swimming incessantly round and round, apparently disorientated. There are reports from Monterey, California, famous for its fish-processing factories, of flying pelicans banging into buildings. These incidents, as government scientists at the Aberdeen Marine Lab would no doubt readily confirm, occurred "naturally". Nothing to do with fish farming.

The truth is that the dirty business of fish farming is wreaking havoc. Some farm fish on sale in supermarkets now contain dangerous dioxins. Farm salmon from sites with the disease infectious salmon anaemia are regularly sold to unsuspecting customers. Asda and Safeway – doubtless unknowingly – have bought and sold farm salmon from a site where the neuro-toxic insecticide, ivermectin, is licensed for use – something both companies promised their customers they would never do.

The salmon farm industry, and the regulation of the industry, is a shambles. It is another BSE-like crisis, not just waiting to happen, but happening now. I wouldn't feed farmed salmon to my cat, let alone eat it myself. And, for the time being, I would give Scottish scallops, mussels and oysters a wide berth.

'Old Trout'



■ROTTEN BOROUGHS■

HISTORY OF ABUSE

WITH John Carroll, the former head of a children's home in Lambeth, having pleaded guilty to 35 sample charges of child abuse at Liverpool crown court on 5 July, several questions remain unanswered in relation to the 21 years he spent working for the south London borough.

They relate to how he and his wife were unofficially allowed to act as "uncle and aunt" to two children from 1988, even though neighbouring Croydon had turned down an application from Carroll to foster children in 1986 – and warned Lambeth that he had failed to disclose a conviction for indecent assault on a 12-year-old boy in 1966. Wandsworth council then vetted a fostering application from Carroll on Lambeth's behalf in 1987 and recommended he be turned down. Lambeth let him go on with an "informal" arrangement with the two youngsters anyway.

Questions which still need addressing include: **Who** allowed this to happen? **What** pressure, and by whom, was placed on fostering panel members to approve it? **Why** was a Lambeth social worker threatened with disciplinary action when they warned Lambeth about Carroll *before* his old offence came to light? **Where** are those panel members currently employed and in what capacity? **How** were two members of Lambeth social services allowed to get away with asking Wandsworth staff to lie about the discovery of Carroll's previous conviction?

A spokeswoman for Lambeth told the *Eye*: "No members of the then fostering panel are currently employed by us, but investigations are continuing. We are not aware of anyone having been threatened with disciplinary action over whistle-blowing and we cannot comment on the suggestion that people were asked to lie. We are anxious to hear from anyone with any further information, which will be treated sensitively and in the strictest of confidence. These matters are the subject of continuing inquiries and more arrests are possible."

OY VAGUE

RESIDENTS of Hackney are becoming concerned about the memory of their Tory mayor, Joe Lobenstein MBE, who has a habit of forgetting to mention his connections with planning applicants when items come up for consideration by the planning committee on which he sits.

So concerned are some locals that they have written to Hackney's borough secretary and to Inspector Knacker, alleging numerous "serious irregularities and malpractice" in the granting of planning applications by the Stamford Hill neighbourhood committee.

For instance, on 14 April 1998, the committee passed an application from the Yeshivo Horomo talmudical college for a dormitory extension at the college's premises at 100 Fairholt Road, N16. Cllr Lobenstein voted in favour of it. He neglected to declare, however, that he and his wife Bella are governors of an orthodox Jewish charity company called Belljoe Tzedoko Ltd (Bella 'n' Joe – geddit?) which donated at least £9,000 to Yeshivo Horomo between 1989 and 1995, including £4336 in 1995 alone.

On 7 December last year the planning committee passed another application, from a Mr Meisels, for number 39 Craven Walk N16 to be converted from residential to synagogue use, as an enlargement of an existing synagogue at number 37. Cllr Lobenstein's fellow Tory planning committee member Jacob Grosskopf declared a non-pecuniary interest in the application and took no part in the discussion or decision (he lives next door, at number 41, and is connected to a charity which has made donations to the College of Higher Rabbinical Studies, which runs the synagogue). But Cllr Lobenstein voted in favour of the application, despite being the vice-president of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations, itself a financial supporter of the College of Higher Rabbinical Studies. Another fact which slipped his apparently failing memory.

HURLEY BURLEY

SIMON DAVIS, former editor of the *Daily Telegraph*'s Peterbore column, wrote a long piece for the paper's Weekend section on 26 June praising the plans of Liz Hurley's pal Henry Dent-Brocklehurst for his ancestral home, Sudeley Castle, at Winchcombe in Gloucestershire, where he soon plans to move with his model wife, former Miss Missouri Peanut, Lili.

Apart from mentioning Hurley a splendid six times, Davis gave Dim-Brocklehurst room to expand on his great ideas for Sudeley and Winchcombe. "Without being feudal about it, stately homes should... function as a guiding light," blathered D-B. "Our aim is to bring people together and demonstrate that things can be achieved." What he is very keen to achieve is the construction of an "ecologically sound ... small shopping complex" in some "old farm buildings" between the castle and the town. A small number of malcontents, noted Davis, were stirring up trouble and opposing the plans.

The malcontents in fact comprise almost the entire population of Winchcombe, who are outraged at D-B's plan to destroy a greenfield site, designated an area of outstanding natural beauty, and build a 450-space car park on it, plus garden centre, shops, restaurant, etc, right on their doorsteps. A working, tenanted farm, not long ago restored with the help of English Heritage, and a stretch of Saxon wall foundations, would have to go.

Winchcombe's town council has declared itself unanimously against the scheme, but the planning decision next month rests 14 miles away with Tewkesbury borough council. While one would expect a hack of Davis's calibre to be impressed by D-B's patronising guff, it is less clear why Tewkesbury's planning supremo Chris Shaw chose to share a platform at a public meeting with the Sudeley Partnership's chief executive Tim Bayliss in an effort to persuade residents that the scheme was a Good Thing. Bayliss and Shaw suggested that it had the backing of English Heritage – which drew a detailed written rebuttal from EH's inspector of historic buildings, Nicholas Molyneux, which concluded: "I can only recommend the refusal of the current application".

IN THE KNOWSLEY

SCOUSERS were surprised to learn that Liverpool's new chief executive is David Henshaw, who has been doing the same job in neighbouring Knowsley for the past 10 years. Why was it necessary for Liverpool to spend a vast sum getting headhunters to scour the land for an "exceptional person" (*Eye* 979), only to end up with the boy next door? Another source of puzzlement is that Henshaw spent most of his time at Knowsley vilifying Liverpool. He blamed the proximity of that city for costing Knowsley investment, and had the dread word "Liverpool" taken out of the postal address.

It will be interesting to see how he adapts to Liverpool's new political culture. He has had 10 years at the helm in what has effectively been a one-party (Labour) state, where he was wont to boast: "I *am* the council." Decisions were taken at great speed, with little consultation, often behind closed doors. Henshaw will expect to run Liverpool in a similar manner, acting as a law unto himself. He has already started to refer to the council as "The Organisation". This is unlikely to go down well with the independent-minded ruling Lib-Dems. Already, it is said, their leader Mike Storey is privately trying to distance himself from the appointment.

Pseuds Corner

The vast and trunkless legs of stone, unattached to the rest of Ozymandias, stand for the ultimate futility of all great achievements. And it makes a merry thought for most of the human race. We who will never conquer vast worlds, who will never make so much as a scratch on the stone of history, can console ourselves with the great thought that we didn't want to do it anyway. but at least Ozymandias did do it..

All of which brings us to Michael Schumacher. He is the opposite of Ozymandias, of whom only the legs remained unbroken. Schumacher is whole apart from a double fracture of the leg, which is something to be thankful for after crashing into a barrier at a fraction less than the speed of light in the British Grand Prix last Sunday.

Schumacher does not have the smug fulfilment of Ozymandias. He knows that what he has achieved – fame, name and fortune – is simply not good enough. He could have been the greatest of them all, but he now lies in bed, or rather on the rack of his own underachievement.

SIMON BARNES
The Times

[Ronald] Reagan's work, especially during the 1980s, crystallized an important philosophical redefinition of the relationship between performance and reality. This was also the decade in which Ethyl Eichenberger and the Ridiculous Theatre helped to re-map gay theatre, and when Split Britches did some of their most challenging work...

PEGGY PHELAN
"Performance and Death: Ronald Reagan", Cultural Values

The body is pretty good; I have a sneaking relief that being ill is common, so I'm never ill, never. I think jet lag is common, too. Ridiculous.

NICKY HASLAM
Sunday Times Magazine

The North London Cultural Diversity Forum, with its clearly stated aims and objectives, provides the necessary infrastructure for a portfolio of public and private sector relationships. This allows the Synergy project to achieve its objectives because it represents the new way of delivering joined-up social and economic value into local communities with the North London social economy.

The Synergy project has been designed as a multi-layered implementational tool. Its strength and dynamism is derived from understanding the cultural attitudes and interactions of providers, consumers and the underlying forces that influence their actions.

Press release

The lilac suede pencil-case I have just bought from the Conran Shop lies in front of us on the cafe table, surrounded by a lavender-coloured pashmina shawl, and my friend is arranging a tiny silver Tiffany heart on a chain so that it nestles between the case and the pashmina, supported by a sugar bowl. I practise putting my Shiseido amethyst eye-colour compact just to the right of the necklace, but my friend, who edits a magazine's consumer features section, and is particularly gifted at draping pashminas, reminds me that less is more... so I put it back in its bag.

We are creating a still-life, as we always do after a girly shopping trip. All cash and energy spent, off we go to the nearest cafe to review the morning's work by arranging it in an aesthetically pleasing manner.

REBECCA TYRREL
Sunday Telegraph Magazine

CONTRIBUTORS: Nick Smillie, A. Lecturer, Kathleen Stock, Martin Brockwell, Daniel Martin, Dr I.M. Ingram.

£10 paid for entries

Letters

Ski whizz

Sir,

Strange goings on at Private Eye, the periodical which wields the simple sword of truth on behalf of the great British public.

It's not like the Eye to involve children when aerating the faeces ("Snow Joke", Eye 980). So how come it chooses to take a pop at Chemmy Alcott (16) – a young skier whose talent had secured her a place in the British ski team long before daddy's election to a post at the British ski and snowboarding federation. Chemmy won the individual events at the World school championships, took a bronze medal at the European junior olympics and is the current holder of the coronation cup. She is one of only three or four skiers whose place in the British team is absolutely undisputed.

Yours,
Name and address withheld.

Sir,

Many thanks for the kind plug (World of Sport, Eye 980). Any chance of mentioning our sponsor, Thomson? To be precise we trade as "Thomson British Ski Academy".

Yours faithfully,
MALCOLM ERSKINE,
Thomson British Ski Academy.

Firm friends

Sir,

Your story (Eye 980) on my alleged anti semitic proclivities was completely untrue.

I have never said "I wouldn't use a Jewish firm". I have never been anti semitic and I do not instruct private practice lawyers whether "Jewish" or otherwise, as all my legal work is done in-house. I have enjoyed good relations with DJ Freeman and have assisted them on several occasions and continue to do so. They are one of two firms with Jewish partners that I recommend to friends and acquaintances.

Your story is particularly hurtful as I work with Jewish people every day and head a department of six lawyers, one of whom is Jewish and all bar one (myself included) are of mixed or non-English racial origin.

It is a pity you failed to contact me beforehand as I could have told you this and a good deal more.

Yours faithfully,
GLENN DEL MEDICO,
BBC Programme Legal Advice Department.

●*Would the person who sent the item of Sir Jams Memorabilia please contact us (in confidence) so we can check on the authenticity of the item?*

World class

Sir,

BBC World (Eye 980) is not without its faults, but I would much rather watch it (and pay for it through the licence fee) than endure News 24 ("News Lite"), which interrupts its bulletins with pointless and stupid pieces of corporate promotion.

Indeed, had HMG had the foresight to fund BBC World, like the World Service, through a Foreign Office grant-in-aid, instead of making it carry advertising, it could easily have taken the place of News 24 in the UK.

In 1994 Star TV (Proprietor: Rupert Murdoch) removed BBC World from its broadcasts into China on the grounds that the government of the People's Republic objected to its news coverage. Surely any medium which can antagonise both the Dirty Digger and the Butchers of Beijing deserves praise from the Eye, not constant snide remarks?

Yours faithfully,
KENNETH WESTMORELAND,
Croydon, Surrey.

Lookalike

Rusbridger

Potter

Sir,

Have any of your readers noticed the startling similarity between the fictional character Harry Potter and Alan Rusbridger, the editor of the Guardian. Could it be magic?

ENA B. ROWLING,
London.

Lost property orifice

Sir,

Pauline Howard (Eye 979) should take heart from the fact that there is a database of lost or stolen property. It is called the Art Loss register. All she has to do is get on the Internet and access http://www.artloss.com

Alternatively, she can contact them at the following address: The Art Loss Register Ltd, 12 Grosvenor Place, London SW1X 7HH. Email: artloss@artloss.com Tel: 0171 235 3393, Fax: 0171 235 1652. They might just be the answer to her prayers.

Alternatively, she might like to get a job as a Chief Constable somewhere when a suitable position is next available.

I remain, sir, a fat bastard,
SIMON McCLEAN,
Maplehurst, West Sussex.

Opera chorus

Sir,

True, only a pissed old hack could have written the Lunchtime O'Boulez piece in Eye 980 about Cardiff Singer of the Year.

Anyone with even a rudimentary appreciation of bel canto (translation for p.o.hs: the technique of beautiful singing) knows that the lieder winner had a voice of stunning and rare quality; to smear him with a snide reference to Taffia chicanery is unworthy of your organ.

And equally so was it to suggest that the highly accurate Telegraph criticism of Lesley Garrett (a natural and enjoyable comic actress whose art remains untroubled by bel canto) was but the product of lover's pique.

Shame on you.
PETER RYAN,
Manchester.

Sir,

Flattered and delighted as I am to feature in Lunchtime O'Boulez's whimsical fantasy "The World of Opera" (Eye 980), I must point out that Mr Gerald Martin Moore and I have not "parted"; that Miss Lesley Garrett has never threatened to sue Mr Moore; that my interest in Miss Garrett's talents dates back to a profile I wrote of her in the Observer in 1991, long before I had made Mr Moore's acquaintance; and that my (widely shared) view that ENO's production of The Carmelites was a triumph hardly constitutes a "u-turn" in my continuing concern for standards of singing at the London Coliseum.

Yours etc,
RUPERT CHRISTIANSEN,
Daily Telegraph, London E14.

Sir,

Given your interest in opera, I am surprised at the lack of accuracy in the most recent edition of Private Eye. Yes. It is true that Gerald had Lesley singing Fledermaus on his answering machine, and that this was not a flattering recording – as she failed to reach the top note, emitting a bit of a screech instead. This message was on his machine for about two weeks before he tired of it and replaced it with something else. All of this occurred 10 years ago.

Lesley Garrett has never threatened to sue. In fact, it was doubtful she even knew of the message until years later. Rupert Christiansen has criticised Lesley in many of his articles, long before meeting Gerald, and in fact, his hatchet-job on ENO in the Spectator appeared in 1986 or 1987 and he only met Gerald in 1998. The timing of his article on Lesley probably had more to do with her television show, a South Bank Special, her starring at ENO in Barber of Seville and her appearance on a poster billed as one of "the world's top classical singers" all coinciding, rather than a rather dodgy recording Gerald had of her 10 years previous.

That Gerald would share in Rupert's disregard for ENO is also inaccurate – Gerald works with several singers there on a regular basis and to rubbish the company on his part would be self-destructive. For that matter, Gerald and Rupert have not "parted company" and the U-turn in Rupert's tone might be better explained by the fact he actually liked the most recent production he saw there – thus giving it a good review!

Anyway – with the facts straight it's not much of a story really, and I would have given the Eye more credit, as I assume (still) that you do make as much effort as you can to check your FACTS.

Hope that clears things up.

Sincerely,
FRANCES MOORE,
Via fax.

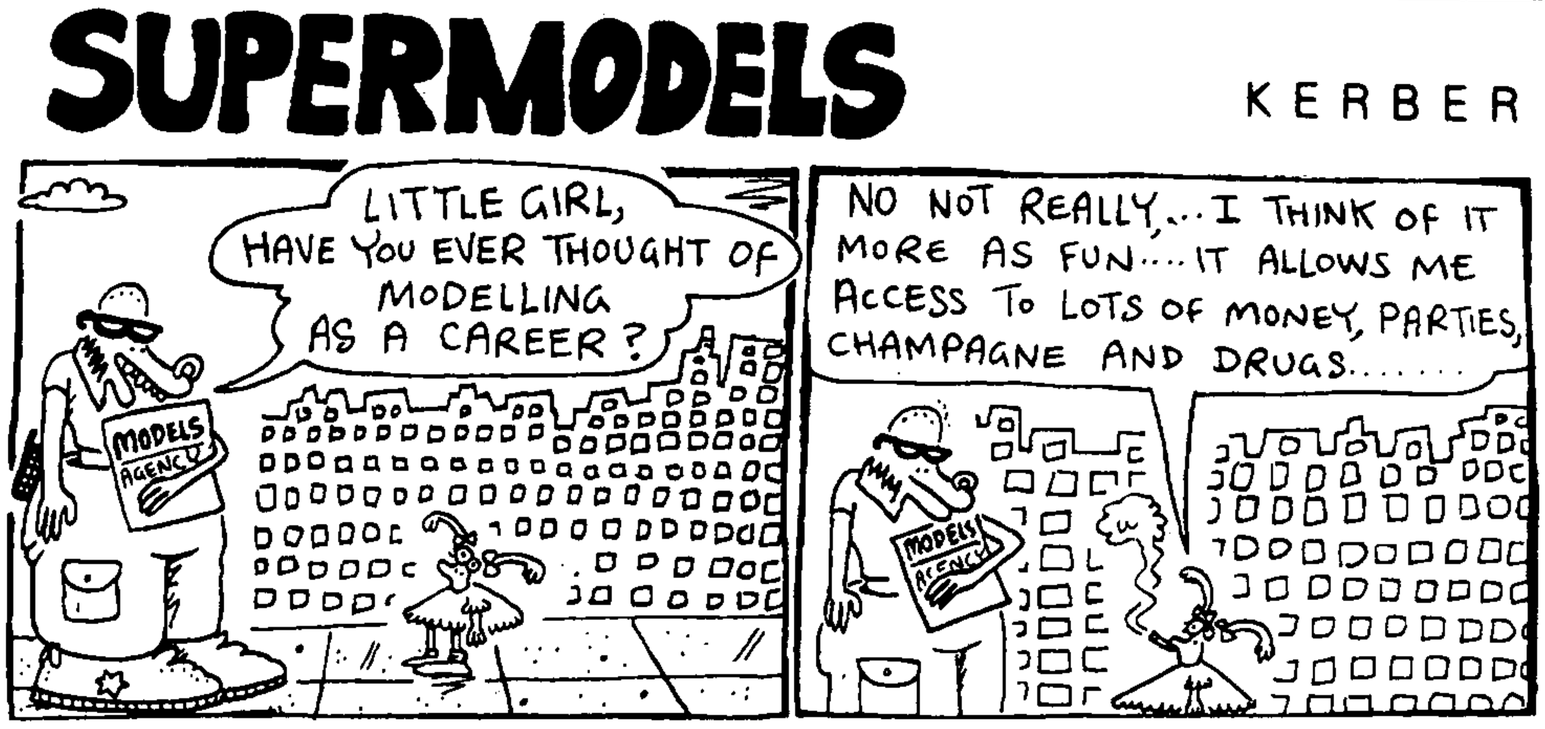
Innocent

Sir,

We act for Kate Adie and have noticed the cartoon appearing at the foot of page 10 of your edition numbered 980 dated 9 July 1999.

Kate Adie was not and has not been dropped by the BBC and this can be confirmed by Richard Sambrook, head of news gathering for the BBC.

Yours faithfully,
STEPHENS INNOCENT,
Solicitors
London EC4


SUPERMODELS
KERBER
LITTLE GIRL, HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OF MODELLING AS A CAREER?
MODELS AGENCY
NO NOT REALLY,... I THINK OF IT MORE AS FUN.... IT ALLOWS ME ACCESS TO LOTS OF MONEY, PARTIES, CHAMPAGNE AND DRUGS.....
MODELS AGENCY

I-SPY

Paris

Submitted by John McRobie. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

Eye cheer up a squaddie

Sir,

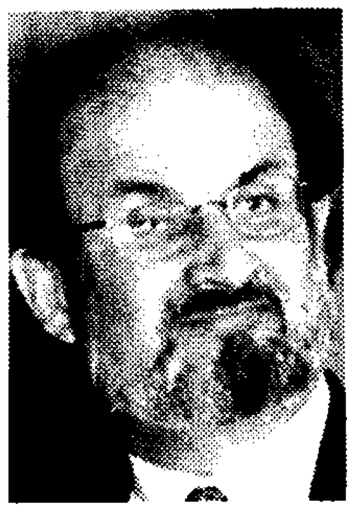
At the moment my company is part of KFOR (Kosovo Peacekeeping Force) working South of Pristina. When I read the newspapers or magazines, when we get them, I am led to believe the only British troops in Kosovo are seemingly the Paras and Gurkhas. This I can assure you is untrue, my soldiers are working just as hard in extremely dangerous and testing conditions without any recognition from the British media. It is however not the purpose of my letter to ask for either sympathy or media coverage; but simply to ask for your help in giving my soldiers a morale boost they so rightly deserve. If you could spare a few lines in your magazine and mention the soldiers in A Company, 1 R Irish by name, I know it would be greatly appreciated by soldiers and families alike. Also, if you could print the address below, so any lonely or not so lonely females can write, I would be in your debt.

Yours sincerely,
CAPTAIN H.G.L. TILLEY,

A Company, 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment, Kosovo, OP AGRICOLA.

Lookalike

Salman



Stanley

Sir,

I wonder if any of your readers have noticed, as I have, the extraordinary resemblance between fugitive author Salman Rushdie and deceased film director Stanley Kubrick. Surely they must be related?

IAN FRASER SINCLAIR,

London W4.

Student moans

Sir,

There is a slight inaccuracy in the Student Loans Company's apologia (Letters, Eye 980), which I hope I may correct.

For "students who decide to take out a loan" read "less-well-off students who are forced to take out a loan because they will now have no other means of subsistence".

This is not a matter of choice, except of the take-it-or-leave-higher-education variety. Students are ineligible for DSS benefits and housing benefit. They are not attractive to employers, other than as hamburger sales staff, and they are not available during normal working hours for most of the year. And the maintenance grant has been reduced – year on year – to nothing this year.

With very few exceptions, your organ being one, the media have followed the lead of the dim and incompetent NUS in highlighting the issue of tuition fees, and continue to do so despite the fact that poorer students are completely exempt from this. What really weights the system in favour of education-for-the privileged is the colossal debt to which those least able to sustain it are automatically committed by the Student Loan Scheme.

With a 45 percent take-up of deferment by students who entered the system when there was still a 75 percent or 50 percent grant component, the auguries are poor for 2001-2's graduates who entered when they were only given 25 percent (for one year only – the previous year had 50 percent for the duration of their undergraduate course), or when, after this year, all funding was by loan.

No wonder the SLC is selling off its loan accounts to anyone who will take them – another little-reported fact, which was announced by the SLC, as a fait accompli, to loan holders earlier this year. Between deferments, and the relocation of new graduates to well-paid posts in countries beyond the reach of the SLC's bailiffs (the Inland Revenue), I doubt if the purchasers of student loan debts will see 50p in the pound. And I doubt if this country's crying shortage of graduates in engineering and applied sciences will be mitigated, either.

What really twists the knife in the wound for today's undergraduates must surely be the knowledge that the Tory and Blairite legislators who conceived and executed this nonsense were largely educated at state expense, at least at university level.

Yours faithfully,
J.H. BRINDLE,

Durham.

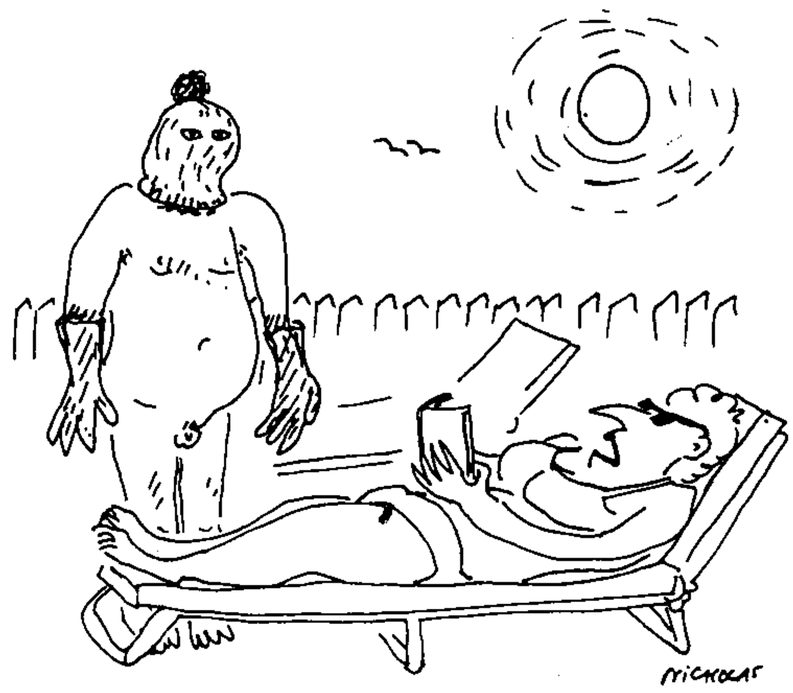
Sir,

Hazel Cadenhead of the Student Loans Company proudly announces that the telephone lines for ex-students in arrears are open 0800 to 0830 Monday to Thursday. Does she really think that ex-students in arrears on their student loans are out of bed that early?

Yours sincerely,
MIKE HOLMANS,

Pimlico, SW1.

Lord of the Dance, Michael Flatley, with a fortune conservatively estimated at £50, joins the Rich List for the first time. *Irish Post*



"Well, yes, that's one way to even out your suntan"

Hardcore Dawn

Sir,

In Dawn Airey's absence on holiday, I rush to her defence. Yes, of course Channel 5 has far fewer established and successful shows than our terrestrial competitors – we started with a blank sheet of paper 27 months ago, and have only a fraction of their programme budget. They have had decades and billions to build their core schedule.

I could easily quote back to you a score of favourable comments on our programmes – including many for the titles whose scathing reviews you cite. That's not the point. Critics think in stereotypes. Two years ago, they could only talk about Channel 5 in terms of "snowy" pictures. When was that tired old chestnut last wheeled out? Now it's the misquote of "films, fucking and football" – though what Dawn actually said was that, contrary to popular assumptions, Channel 5 was much more than films, fucking and football. Fortunately, most viewers rightly leave the critics unread, and Channel 5's rising audience share suggests that our steadily improving programming is meeting with increasing approval.

We'd be the first to acknowledge that there's a long way to go – but if Dawn can already win a 9 percent share of viewing in the 10.5m homes that have just five channels, all of which have the same picture quality, it's not surprising that people can see what an impact she might have on BBC1. Pity it won't be put to the test just yet.

Yours sincerely,
DAVID ELSTEIN,

Chief Executive, Channel 5

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

American Police Officer: *...at this point the suspect Benjamin Smith shot himself.*
Sue McGregor: *And do we know the name of the dead suspect?*
American Police Officer: *Yes... Benjamin Smith.*
Radio 4
(Alastair L. Gray)

"Sales of the impotence drug Viagra... will be subject to stiff restrictions."
News Presenter, Channel 5
(Mike Waldie)

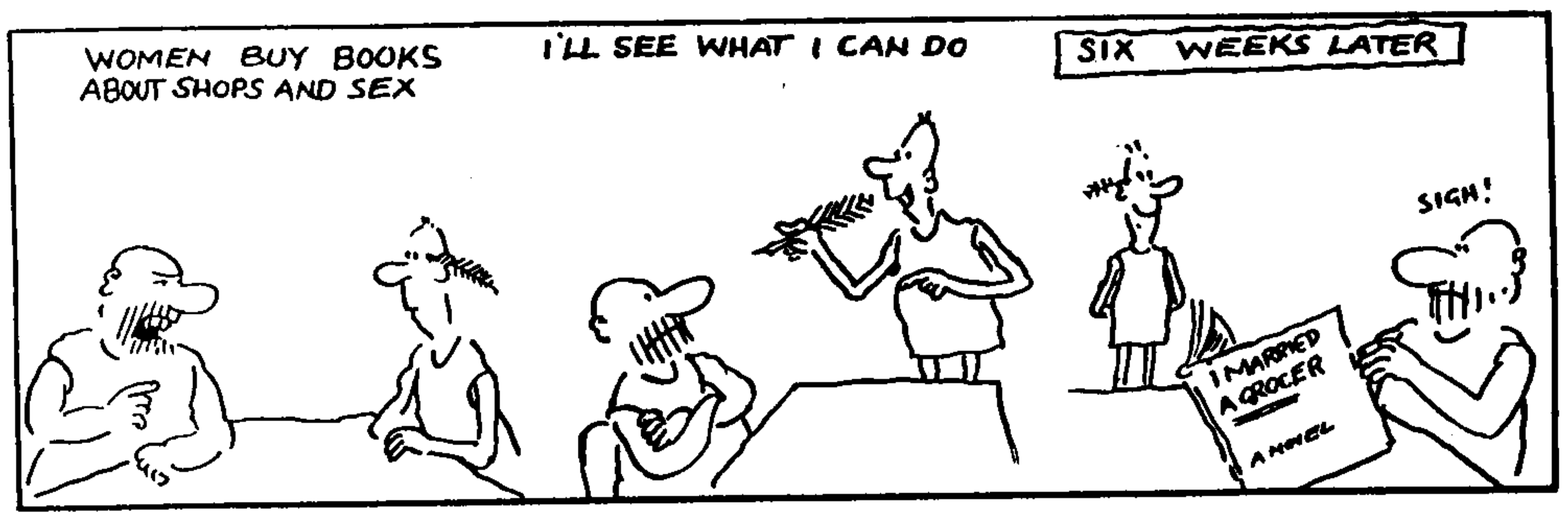
"...it's got to be better than decisions made behind smoke-filled doors."
EVE POLLARD, Radio 5
(Unknown)

"I know what is around the corner – I just don't know where the corner is. But the onus is on us to perform and we must control the bandwagon."
KEVIN KEEGAN
(Gary Dean)

"People's perception of a chairman's job is not the same as they think it is..."
DAVE EDWARDS, Radio 5 Live
(Mrs P. Scott)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH

● **"NOT ALL MY LOVERS: I would hereby like to thank Paul Edmunds for his positive review of my exhibition, 'The Quest for Zero Defect'. It made my Friday. Just in case it ruined anyone else's (that is, the six men featured as my 'ex-lovers' in one of the accompanying photographs), I need to correct you on one point.**

"The featured individuals may now find themselves knee-deep in shit, especially the one who has been involved in a relationship with a man for ten years. Although all six men donated their sperm to me for my 'Sperm Halo', I can only claim one as being an ex-lover. Interesting as the concept of my having engaged in sexual intercourse with over a hundred men in the space of two months for the purpose of art production may be, it is an erroneous one. The participants in the 'Sperm Halo' project delivered their sperm by hand, and any assistance provided was given by their actual lovers, not by me. Said sperm was then deposited in airtight Vacutac containers and dropped off at the gallery or my home. My sincerest apologies then, to anyone who was confused, offended, baffled, or miffed by the allegation that they had had sex with me. VERONIQUE MALHERBE, CAPE TOWN." *(Letter in Mail & Guardian [South Africa], 21/5/99. Spotter: Paul Plunkett)*

—●—

● "It was better than playing football!" said three-foot-tall Murillo Soares Maia at a mass rally in Belo Horizonte, after hot wax had been poured onto his bare thigh by Tiazinha, Brazil's most popular children's tv presenter. "I can die now. I've just been hot-waxed by the coolest person on Earth."

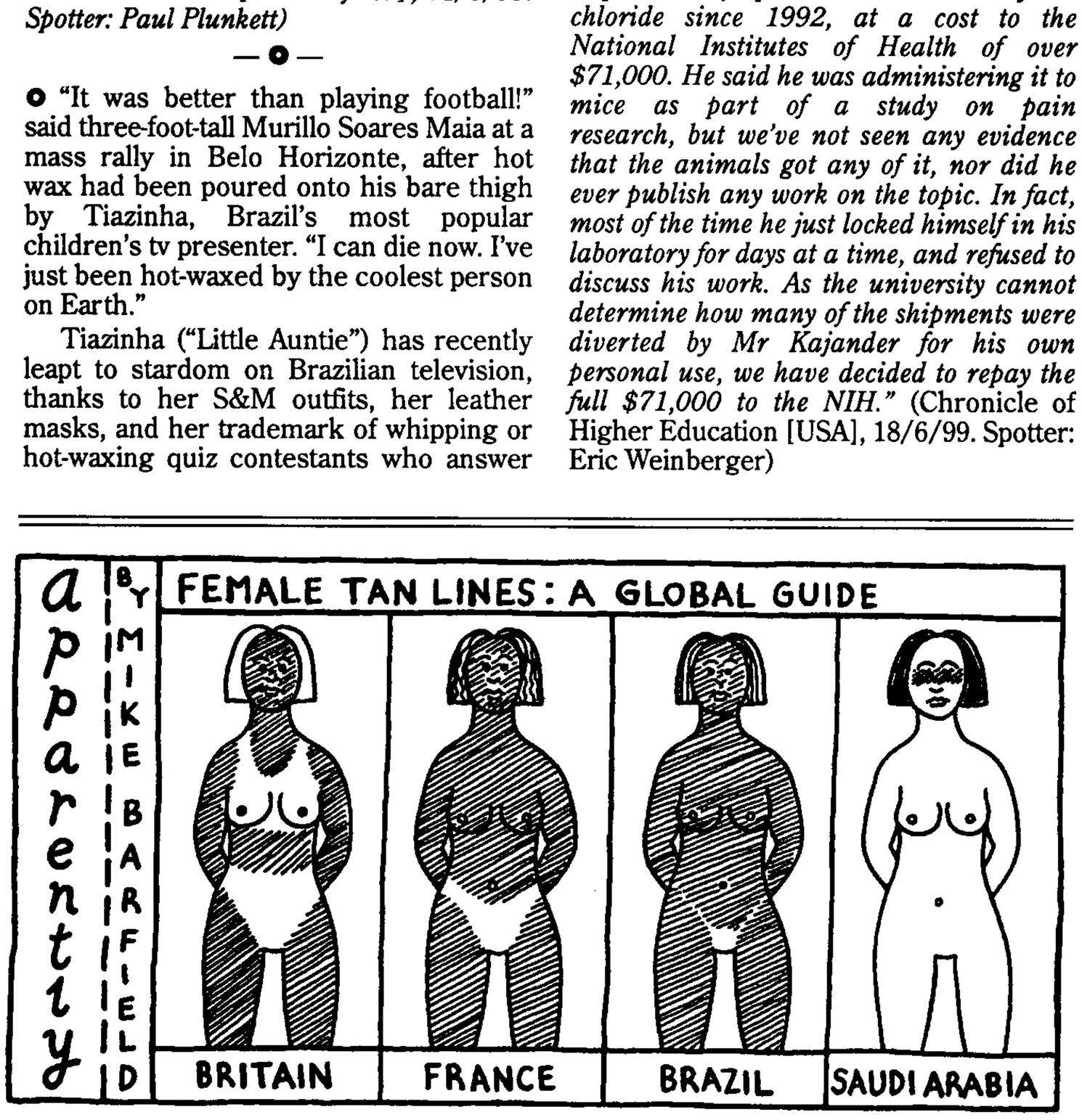
Tiazinha ("Little Auntie") has recently leapt to stardom on Brazilian television, thanks to her S&M outfits, her leather masks, and her trademark of whipping or hot-waxing quiz contestants who answer questions incorrectly. The Dominatrix has millions of fans (who queue for hours for the chance of being lashed), and countless imitators. "A religious organisation recently called me a 'disgusting mole'," she told reporters, "but I wet on the boots of bigots, and I whip their ears with a fly swat. At the Carnival this year, we had everyone from straight housewives to homosexual midgets cracking whips, all dressed as Tiazinha. I am a star."

Several Members of Congress have protested that her sado-masochistic behaviour is corrupting the young, but Tiazinha (a former Playboy model called Suzana Alves) remains unfazed by the outcry. "This is all an act. I'm really just a sweet, simple girl who is having a good time. I think my fans see it as silly, too, not just sexy, although some old age pensioners take me a little too seriously. I am currently helping police with their enquiries." *(Gweru Times [Zimbabwe] 29/6/99. Spotter: Carl Smith)*

—●—

● *"It is not uncommon for large research establishments to conduct studies involving controlled substances, although most institutions don't talk about it a lot," admitted Moira Kean, Director of the Research Subjects' Protection Program at the University of Minnesota. "But, under the circumstances, we will now review our policies on the handling of controlled substances, and determine whether we perhaps need to step up our laboratory supervision procedures."*

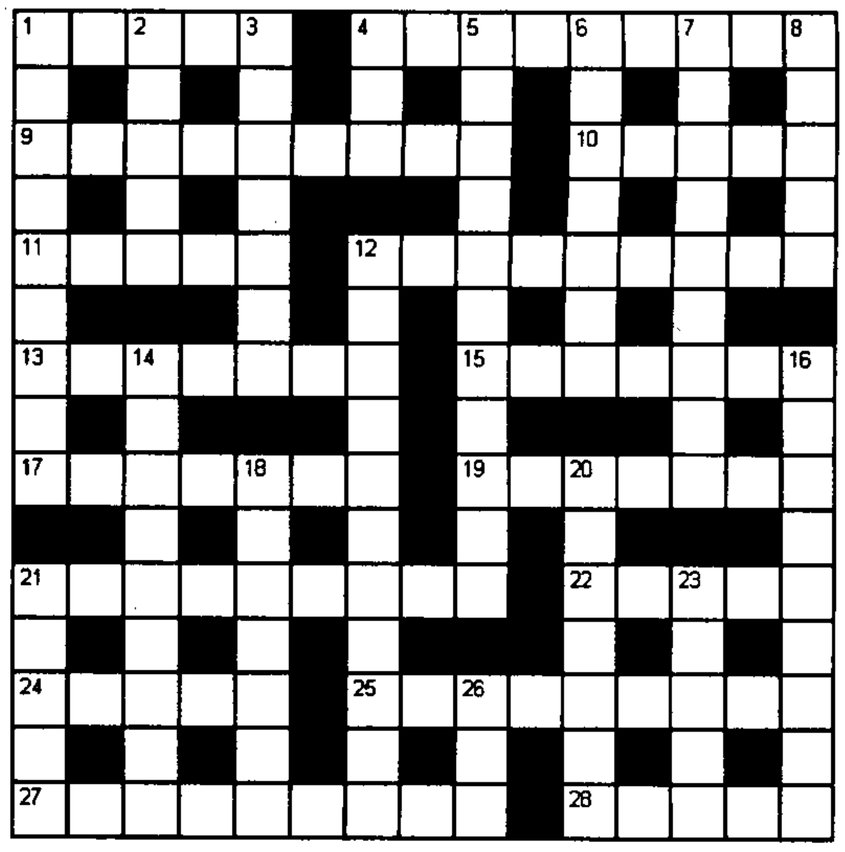
Ms Kean was speaking after the death of Keith C. Kajander, an associate professor of oral sciences and cell biology. "Mr Kajander died of a massive cocaine overdose on April 28. After his death, we discovered that he had ordered a total of twenty-eight shipments of powdered cocaine hydrochloride since 1992, at a cost to the National Institutes of Health of over $71,000. He said he was administering it to mice as part of a study on pain research, but we've not seen any evidence that the animals got any of it, nor did he ever publish any work on the topic. In fact, most of the time he just locked himself in his laboratory for days at a time, and refused to discuss his work. As the university cannot determine how many of the shipments were diverted by Mr Kajander for his own personal use, we have decided to repay the full $71,000 to the NIH." (Chronicle of Higher Education [USA], 18/6/99. Spotter: Eric Weinberger)



EYE CROSSWORD 136

by Cyclops

£100 prize



ACROSS

1/28 He keeps a young woman shifting 500 drugs a day (5,5)
4 One drink on date and historic engagement results! (9)
9/5 Release on dodgy Foreign Office dirt makes Bill liable to be rendered more and more ineffective by Straw and co.? (7,2,11)
10 Unwieldy, I say about the Financial Times (5)
11 Brown, rather dull, takes on flipping European Commission, the halfwit! (5)
12 Romantic poet/dominator close to disgraced ex-Minister (4,5)
13 Having an erection, Dan awkwardly gets out of bed – on which, things improve (2,3,2)
15 Disposal of pictures, etc. of some tart, Sal, evidently (3,4)
17 Bob resists upsetting feminists (7)
19 Dicky gets head – it won't make him feel good (7)
21 Notorious bunker – call round off! (4,5)
22 Dope ring: self-righteous Greek character flips (5)
24 One using viewers for lewd purposes needs to look right (5)
25 Price rises: just what blow-up dolls need! (9)
27 Mean mag. on about some murdered royal (9)
28 (see 1ac.)

DOWN

1 Weak and foolish dopes supplying grass, etc. (4,5)
2 Polish lacking such a political party? (5)
3 Embarrassed to get oral sex from someone like Chris Evans? (7)
4 Member extension (3)
5 (see 9)
6 Firm convention to have a live-in lover? (7)
7 Grabbing parking, fear soul sadly may be bought (2,3,4)
8 Tory's new scheme is just an attempt to deceive (3-2)
12 UNO politics: puerile cosmetic surgery (11)
14 Down under there's someone beneath Clinton in a state (9)
16 Sexually obliging given cash – income that's not earned (4,5)
18 Measure regal bust and pad out (7)
20 Revealing habit of sailor in dole involvement (7)
21 The body's natural drug function is found in lap dancing (1-4)
23 What Homer came out with in Brasilia – "Doh!" (5)
26 Expect a blow-job from this admirer? (3)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 30.7.99. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

Solution to Crossword No. 135

Winner: SIMON FRANCIS

ACROSS: 1 Dickhead 5 Toss-up 10 Stasi 11 Dirty work 12 Insane 13 Newsreel 15/7 Rosetta Stone 16 Boycott 18 Tea 19 Snuff it 21 Cold war 24 Do-gooder 26/30 Earl of Wessex 28 Last straw 29 Icing 30 (see 26) 31 Elegance.

DOWN: 1 Dossier 2 Ceausescu 3 Hairnet 4 Aids 6 Odyssey 7 (see 15) 8 Pikelet 9 Greenback 14 Battle-cry 17 Orwellian 19 Sod's law 20 Floosie 22 Leaking 23 Refugee 25 Gasps 27 AWOL.

John F. Kennedy Junior – An Apology

IN COMMON with all other newspapers, we heard the news about Kennedy a bit on the late side yesterday and cobbled together twenty pages saying Kennedy was a national hero, the true heir to Camelot, whose death would be mourned by the entire American nation.

Headlines such as "Americans Weep For Their Diana", "Last of the Golden Dynasty Taken From Us", and "The Tragedy To End All Tragedies" may have given the impression that we regarded the late Mr Kennedy as a national icon, the only hope for his generation, and a shining beacon for the entire civilised world.

We now realise that there was not a jot or scintilla of truth in this whatsoever, and that the young John Kennedy was nothing more than a pampered playboy whose reckless self-indulgence led inevitably to not only his own premature death but to that of his wife and sister-in-law.

We would like to apologise to all our readers for any confusion this may have caused.

CURSE OF THE KENNEDYS

by Our Kennedy Staff **Nigel** (formerly known as Dempster)

IT SEEMS like some terrible curse. Just when things appear to be going well and the future looks bright, another Kennedy dies and everyone is obliged to read through hundreds of articles about the curse of the Kennedys.

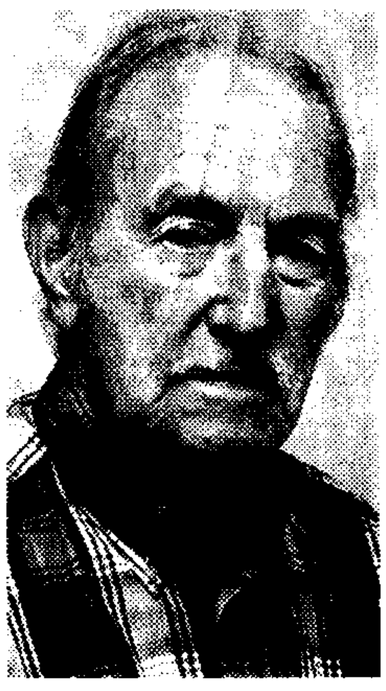
It all began with JFK, but every few years history repeats itself with uncanny regularity: Chappaquiddick, the skiing accident, the one after that, Bobby Kennedy (or was that before?) ... er... er... the grassy knoll, er... er... er... will this do?

© All newspapers. First printed in 1963.

That Doomed Kennedy Clan

Sir Ludovic Kennedy = **Lady Euthanasia Kennedy**

- **Charles Kennedy** (doomed Liberal Democrat leader)
- **Nigel Kennedy** (ill-fated violinist, shot by an angry music lover)
- **Red Kennedy** (doomed London Mayor eaten alive by his own newts)
- **Sarah Kennedy** (ill-fated Radio 2 disc jockey with alcohol problems)
- **John F. Kennedy Airport** (doomed air terminal where millions of suitcases mysteriously disappear every year)



TV Highlights

Prescott And Son

BBC1 9.00pm *(Repeat)*

IN tonight's episode of the classic comedy, the upwardly-mobile John (played by Harold Steptoe) is mocked by his father Bert (played by Albert Steptoe) for betraying his working class roots and mixing with "the middle classes".

Young John is mortified and tells his father to mind his own business. "I'll never speak to you again, you dirty old booger," he tells the old man before he opens a bottle of champagne and eats a bucket of caviar.

Eye Rating: Hilarious.

LORD ARCHER'S OFFICIAL CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE RHYMING SLANG

"My advice would be to loosen his trousers, mate"

General Pinochet Interviews Dominic Lawson

IT IS HARD to imagine that the quiet bespectacled figure sitting in front of me in his Sussex mansion is regarded as one of the ruthless figures ever to preside over a Sunday newspaper.

In a frank and fearless interview I put the following question to the hated tyrant:

"Dominic, you have a reputation for being a dictator whose regime carried out terrible purges where your readers mysteriously disappeared. Can you tell me aaaargh... !!!"

Obituary

General Pinochet 94

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

I know there's been a lot of idle gossip around the parish recently suggesting that there has been some kind of a falling-out between myself and that stalwart bastion of the working men's club, John Prescott!

How sad it is that some people seem to have nothing better to do on these lovely long summer days we've been enjoying than to indulge in idle chit chat, manufacturing differences which do not exist!

Let me make it clear once and for all that I am second to none in my admiration for the way John runs the working men's club.

No one could do a better job than John in keeping up morale among the older members of the parish, as he did so effectively last weekend when he opened the car boot sale in aid of the Millennium Tent at the municipal sewage farm!

John may not have had the benefit of a good education like some of us. He may be lacking in some of the social airs and graces.

He may, on occasion, put his foot in it. But that's John, a rough diamond doing a difficult job, and it's not for the rest of us to be judgmental about his failings just because he has more of them than most of us!

And, above all, I have to take issue with this silly idea that I myself am out of touch with the older parishioners and the kind of people who go to John's club.

So let's stop all this silly tittle-tattle and get back to discussing the really important issues that are of concern to us all.

As the Good Book puts it, "Set your sights on the moral ground; for that way lies the victory"(New Labour Bible, Letter From Peter To The Milbankians).

That is why by far the most important moral issue confronting the world today is the barbarous and cruel practice of fox-hunting.

Every civilised man, woman and child is rightly outraged by the sight of these members of the hereditary peerage who take pleasure in regularly dressing-up simply to enjoy inflicting maximum suffering on a poor innocent animal.

From now on, I shall not rest until every vestige of this unspeakable so-called sport is swept away, and everyone who indulges in it is put behind bars!

I was able to make this point very strongly to our friend in Tęsco, who once again buttonholed me last week while I was standing in the "Baskets Only" queue.

"What do you know about fox hunting, Vicar?" he said.

"Don't you realise that thousands of jobs depend on it, not to mention all the poor dogs which they will have to put down. You only do it to get a bit of cheap popularity because you've got no idea what to do about Northern Ireland."

At this point, he unfortunately fell backwards into a tasting display of Tesco's own new prawn-flavoured crème fraîche presided over by a lady called Elaine in a fetching straw hat and white coat!

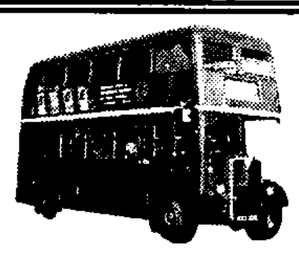
Yours,

Tony

From Mr Campbell, Editor

From now on there will be no more discussion about the vicar's choice of school for his children. This is a private matter and if he chooses to send them to Our Lady of the League Tables rather than St Albion's Sink School that is entirely his own affair. Everyone please note. A.C.

Verses From A Local Poet



When I am Mayor of London
All bus-fares will be free.
I love those London buses
Because they're red, like me!

Ken Livingstone,
Proprietor of Newts R Us,
The Aquatic Pet Centre, The High Street.

To Remember In Your Prayers

Mr Trimble, at the Northern Irish Mission, who has once again messed everything up by refusing to agree to my quite reasonable suggestions which have been worked out with enormous effort over long days and nights by myself – goodness me, how I've tried – so let's all pray that God knocks some sense into his stupid head. Amen.

Notices

■ As usual, I'm taking my usual break and I shall leave the parish in the capable hands of Mr Prescott. If you have any problems, ring me directly on my mobile 0730-446321 or leave a message with Luigi at the Palazzo Magnifico di Popoli, San Pietro di Mandelsoni.

Parish B-B-Q!
News Update!

■ I am thrilled to tell you that at the summer B-B-Q Nick Brown will be putting beef back on the griddle!
So now the Summer Menu reads: Chicken Burgers, Tuna Burgers and Veggie Burgers! Well done, Nick and his team. So, no more beefing about this one!! (T.B.)

Parish Postbag...

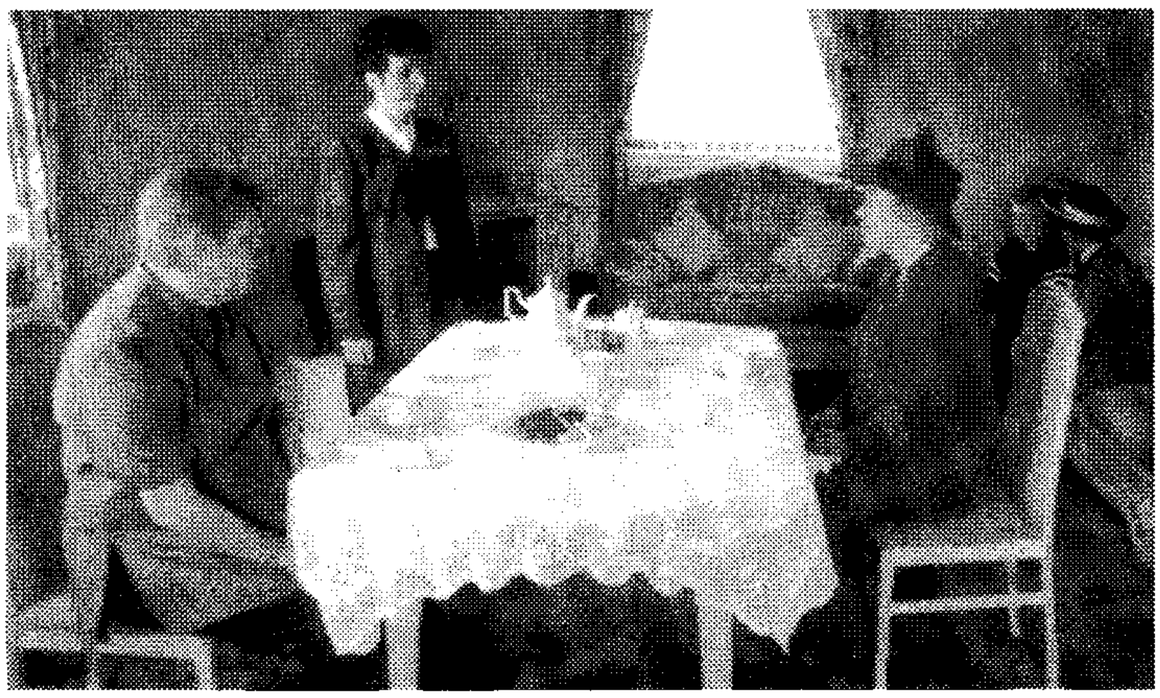
Dear Everyone,

I keep on hearing that the vicar intends to dispense with my services in his annual rationalisation of the team ministry. It is really shameful that someone like myself, who has given years of faithful service to Tony and the team, can suddenly be

Yours sincerely,
Mrs M. Beckett, Caravan 47B,
Somewhere in France.

All letters from parish office-holders about to be sacked may be shortened for reasons of space. A. Campbell, Editor.

Dear Sir,
I would like to protest
Yours sincerely,
Miss G. Jackson, Dunactin,
Hampstead Way.



Lines Written On The Visit Of Her Majesty The Queen To The Home Of Ms Susan McCarron In Glasgow

You sat there in your pink hat,
Waiting for your tea.
You were a stranger to them
As they were to you.

Your Lady-In-Waiting sat in the background
Chatting quietly to Mrs McCarron's son James
You did not speak, Your Majesty.

And yet your silence was eloquence enough.
Then it was time to leave.
You left your Hobnob on the plate.
Uneaten.

© The Poet Laureate, A. Motion 1999.

IS THE SUN GOOD FOR YOU AFTER ALL?

by Our Medical Staff **Dr James Lefuwotascorcha**

SCIENTISTS have always believed that the Sun was extremely damaging to anyone exposed to it, but sensational new research suggests that, in fact, the Sun can be beneficial to health if taken in moderate doses.

The survey, published by top medical research laboratories based in Wapping, claims that the Sun does not, as previously thought, turn your brain into jelly within minutes, causing irritation, nausea and death through terminal boredom.

On the contrary, says Professor Murdoch, the Sun makes you feel better by "giving you a laugh, relaxing the muscles of your brain, and improving my circulation".

Sun Blockhead

Said one of the patients in the survey, a Mr Tony B. from Downing Street: "I always used to try to keep out of the Sun. But now I'm in it all the time – and I've never felt better. Every day I get less and less red. In fact I'm not even slightly pink."

Top spin doctors are backing the report, saying there is no such thing as "over exposure". Said Dr Alastair Campbell: "You don't even have to cover up. Just lie in the Sun and you'll be fine."

"Mum, we can't look after you any more... we've decided to put you in a post office queue"

THAT NEW LABOUR INTEGRATED TRANSPORT POLICY IN FULL

1. **Public transport is overcrowded, unreliable, under-funded and close to breakdown.**
2. **Every means must be employed to encourage people to use public transport rather than their cars.**
3. **er...**
4. **Private Helicopter Lanes on all motorways for use by public officials such as John Prescott.**
5. **er...**
6. **That's it.**

The Alternative Rocky Horror Service Book

No 94: A Service Of Blessing For The Toddlers Of Non-Churchgoing Or Agnostic Parents

President (*for it is she*): A very warm welcome to you all!

All: Thanks.

President: And whose little kiddy is this?

The Parents Of The Child: It is ours, or at least it's hers by her previous partner *(or it may be his by his previous partner of either sex).*

President: Isn't he or she sweet?

The Congregation: Aaaah! *(or they may say Ooooh!)*

President: Great!

(Here may be played a suitable piece of recorded devotional music. It may be "Candle in the Wind" by Sir Elton John, or the Theme from the The Teletubbies Christmas Video)

THE ADDRESS

President: We are not gathered together in the sight of God, because that's not the point of this very special day for little N or M (here he may name the child, as it may be Wain or Shasni). We are not here to stuff a lot of old-fashioned propaganda down people's throats, going on about Jesus, the devil and all that stuff. We're not here to be judgemental. We're here to have a nice occasion and hope that in years to come N or M may remember today and think it might be quite nice to pop into a church from time to time and see what it's all about.

Congregation: Is that it?

President: Well, actually, we usually have a hymn here. But you've probably got better things to do than stand around in church waiting for your baby to be blessed.

All: Get on with it!

THE ACT OF BLESSING

President: Bless you!

Congregation: Take care!

President: Be lucky!

Congregation: Cheers!

(All shall then process to the home of the infant, where a party will keep the neighbours awake until 3 o'clock in the morning)

The Highway Code 1999

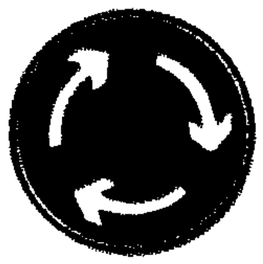
New middle-of-the-road signs (as approved by the Prime Minister for use in the Department of Transport)

No left turn

Danger workers ahead

Third-way traffic only

This isn't a U-turn



Give way to the right

I said give way, John

Stop, you idiot

On your bike, Fatso

Jack Cunningham overhead (That's enough signs. Ed)

THE TIMES FRIDAY JULY 23 1999

THE ASHCROFT AFFAIR – DAY 14

Hague Reels As Sleaze Crisis Engulfs Tories

BY OUR ENTIRE INVESTIGATIVE STAFF LUNCHTIME O'BELIZE

THE Conservative Party was last night staring into the ultimate abyss as new shock revelations came to light concerning the business dealings of Mr Martin Ashgrove, believed to be the only person who has given any money to the Tory Party since 1992.

A leaked Foreign Office document reveals that doubts about the mysterious financier were already being expressed at the highest level in the Foreign Office as early as 1995.

Does Anyone Care?

In a top-secret memo which has come into our possession, dated 14 May 1995, the Deputy Consul in Belize, Mr M.D. Stapler, reported to his chief, Mr E.F. Prittstick, head of the Western Caribbean Desk:

"I had tea this afternoon at the Tax Dodgers' Arms with a Mr Martin Ashford, who claims to be the Treasurer of the Tory Party. Could you look him up in Who's Who, our copy seems to have gone missing. He looked to me a bit of a dodgy customer, and to be quite frank I didn't altogether like the cut of his jib."

The small Central American republic of Belize, formerly British Homestoras, is situated at latitude 23°14' North, and is associated with tax-dodgers and international drug-running.

The Answer Is No

Mr Ashcan became treasurer of the Conservative Party in 1994, and is believed to be a majority shareholder in the notorious Hong Kong, Cayman and Belize Bank.

Last night an embattled Mr Hague issued a statement, standing by his beleaguered treasurer:

"Mr Ashdown has done a superb job as leader of the Liberal Democrats and we all wish him well in his well-deserved retirement."

LATE NEWS

C of E TO REINTRODUCE HERESY TRIALS

THE Church of England has decided to revive the tradition of putting heretic vicars on trial, in an attempt to impose doctrinal discipline on an increasingly heterodox priesthood.

The Synod is determined to crack down on priests who reject the orthodox beliefs of the C of E. The first case comes up next week and involves serious charges against the Rev. Harold Peasmarsh of St Jude's in Neasden who is accused of "believing in God".

(Reuters)

HUSBAND

MAN BREAKS LEG

By Our Grand Prix Staff Michael Shoenotneeded

A MAN who drives very fast cars was yesterday said to be comfortable in hospital after breaking his leg in a high-speed car accident.

"He was probably driving too fast," said an onlooker.

NEW LOOK FOR DICKENS CLASSIC

by Our Television Staff **Oliver Twiston-Davies**

TV CHIEFS have decided that the new £100 million production of Dickens's immortal *Oliver Twist* by Alan Bleasdale should be updated, to make it "more relevant to a contemporary audience".

Says author Bleasdale: "Dickens's story was all very well for its own time, but he would have been the first to admit that it needs to be completely rewritten to bring it into line with the needs of the new millennium."

GREAT SEXPECTATIONS

In the new version, the key figure of Fagin, a racially offensive stereotype, is changed to Fuggin, a lovable Egyptian street-trader who employs an army of pickpockets to take money from the rich people of Knightsbridge and hand it over to him.

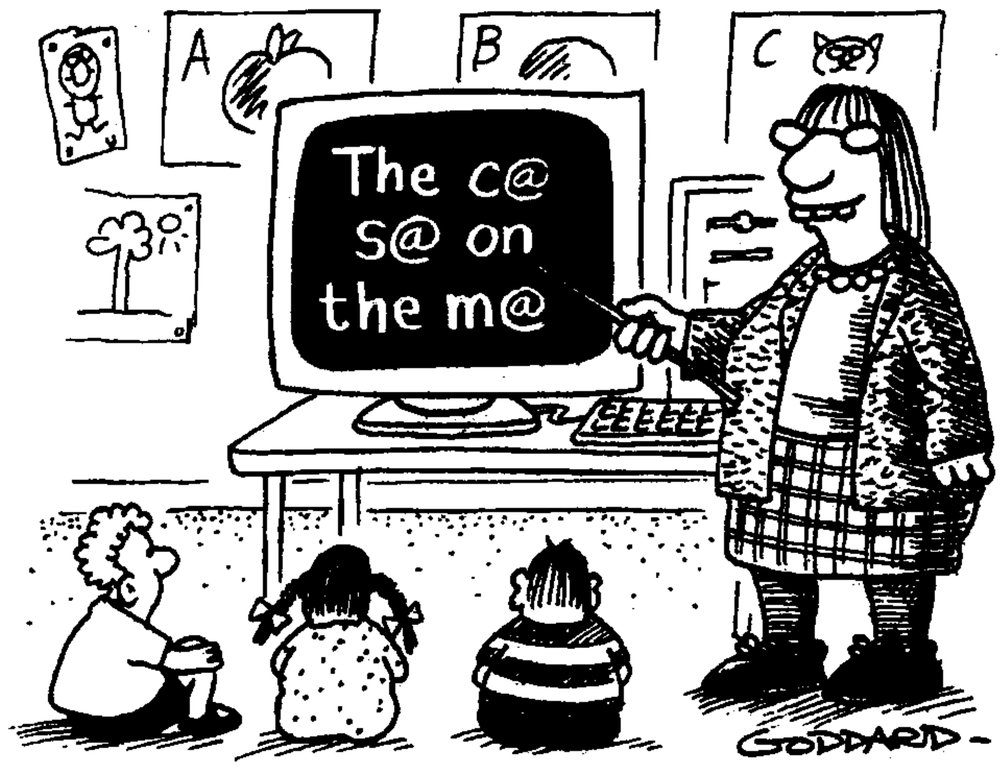
A new sub-plot involves Mr Fuggin's campaign to be accepted as a British citizen, which ends when he is caught stealing jewels from the safe-deposit box of a wealthy German gentleman, Herr Tiny Rowland-Ratt.

CAST IN FULL

Mr Fuggin	BOB HOSKINS
Nancy	MELINDA MESSENGER
Oliver Twist	HUGH GRANT
Bill Sykes	VINNIE JONES
Mr Bumble	LENNY HENRY
Mrs Bumble	DENISE VAN OUTEN
Man in Hansom Cab	LORD FROST

In today's Daily Mail

Do trousers give you cancer? 2
Is the radiation from paper clips killing us? 3
Does reading about health scares make you feel better? . . 94



What you won't read in the Times

The Dangers of An Old Man Taking A Young Bride

Dr Stuttaford writes:

AS A DOCTOR, I am often asked, "Doctor, is it risky for an old man to take a much younger third wife, particularly if she is well versed in the ancient love techniques of the Orient?"

The answer is not simple. If the older man is under a lot of stress through being, say, the proprietor of a worldwide media empire, then the added strain of prolonged sexual activity for, say, twelve hours a day, could lead to serious medical problems.

This condition might be further exacerbated were the businessman in question to have recently been through an acrimonious divorce, involving lengthy wrangling over the disposal of his huge personal fortune.

Was his former wife, say, a director of his main holding company, and were his various children competitors for the inheritance into the bargain, then several hours of steamy love romps with the Chinese lady in question would be highly inadvisable. The Canadian Lancet has suggested in a report that the remedy for the patient's problem might be for him to take his Asian companion for a prolonged holiday in Tuscany, where excessive heat might act as a prophylactic against any excessive amorous propensities.

However, other recent studies, such as that published in the highly-respected French journal Sexualité Aujour d'hui, suggest that sunshine acts as a stimulant to the male libido, resulting in such frenzied bonkfests by the Tuscan pool that the tragically inevitable result will be the sudden death of the elderly billionaire and the unexpected good fortune of the Chinese widow who (prurient rubbish continued on p94)

ROY of the ROVERS
IT'S ROY'S BIG DAY
I, ROY OF THE ROVERS TAKE THEE...
GREAT VOWS ROY!
ACE NUPTIAL SKILLS!
THE WHOLE TEAM WERE REALLY UNITED
HERE'S ONE ENGLISH MATCH WE WILL TURN UP FOR!
HURRAY! WE'RE ONE MILLION UP!
ROY'S PASSED THE RING TO NEVILLE, NEVILLE TO GIGGSY, BACK TO NEVILLE...
THEN CAME THE DECIDER.
ROY'S SIGNED FOR OK MAGAZINE!
SHOOT!
COOPER

ULSTER TALKS COLLAPSE: 'WE BLAME OURSELVES' SAYS NOBODY

by Our Peace Process Staff **D. Hondt-Mechanism**

ULSTER politicians were not lining up last night to point the finger of blame at themselves and were not angrily denouncing their own intransigence in the negotiations as the reason for the stalemate.

Unionist leader David Trimble was quick not to accuse himself of a failure to compromise, and Sinn Fein spokesman Gerry Adams immediately did not fiercely criticise his own refusal to decommission weapons. The SDLP's John Hume too decided not to blame himself for his silence on the arms issue and Dr Ian Paisley failed to chastise himself in a rousing sermon (cont. p. 94)

On other pages
Why It Is All Blair's Fault – by Everyone

SHOULD VOTE HUNTING BE BANNED?

by Our Political Staff **Charles James Fox**

THERE were renewed calls last night for an immediate countrywide ban on the hunting of votes.

Objectors described appalling recent scenes in which the Prime Minister dressed himself up in red and indulged in a sickening and cold-blooded chase of votes.

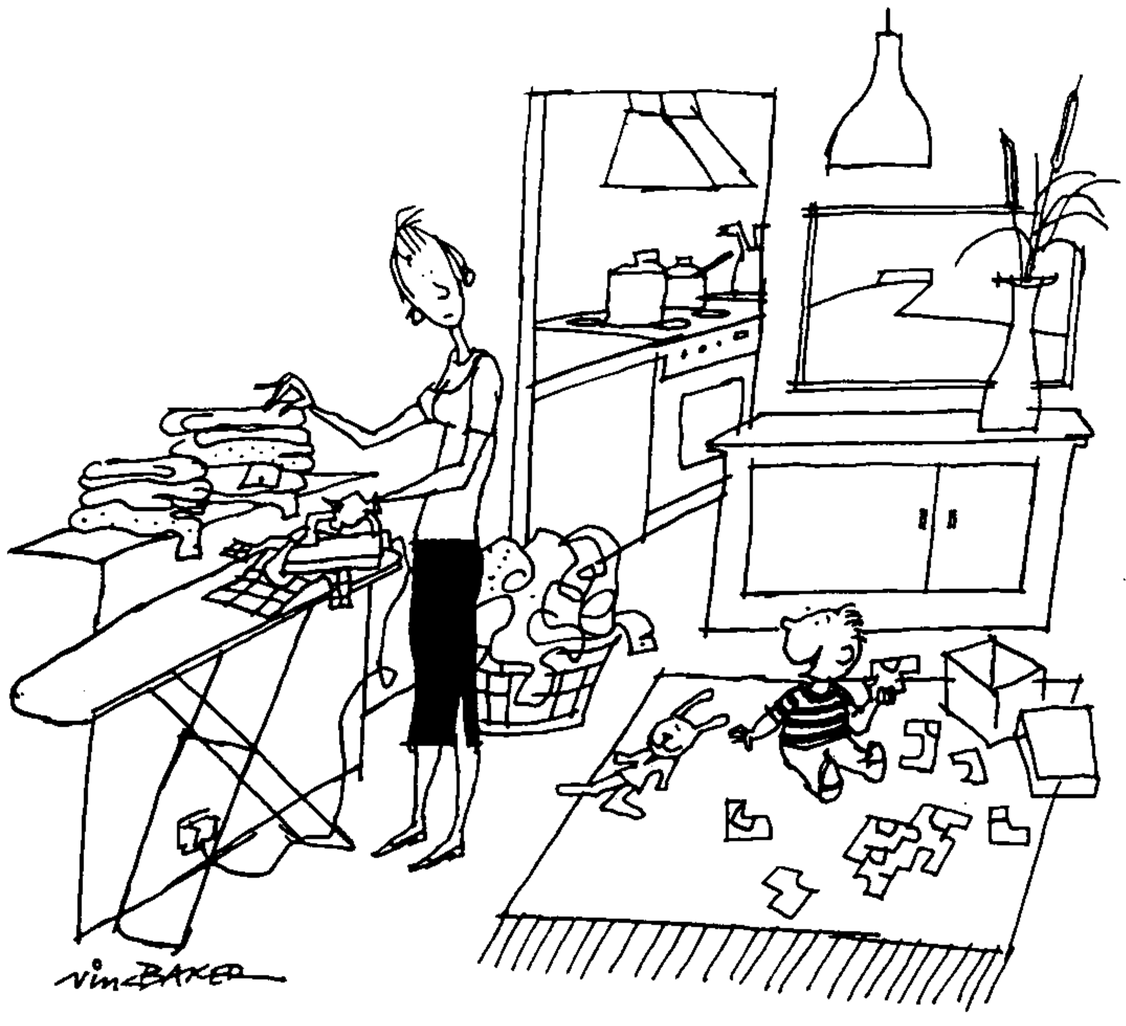
"It made my stomach turn," said one protester. "Blair seemed to get a real kick out of it. He and his upper-class cronies got together and rode roughshod over the entire countryside before going in for the kill."

However Mr Blair, who is Master of the Islington Hunt, defended what he called "an essential feature of traditional English life".

STUPID HUNT

"All we are doing," he said, "is trying to keep the votes under control. You can't have votes roaming around threatening our livelihoods."

He continued: "Besides, I present a wonderful spectacle as I charge around at the head of my traditional followers, with our whips working overtime and our timeless cries of 'Tally Votes!' and 'Left-Wing View Hulloo!' "

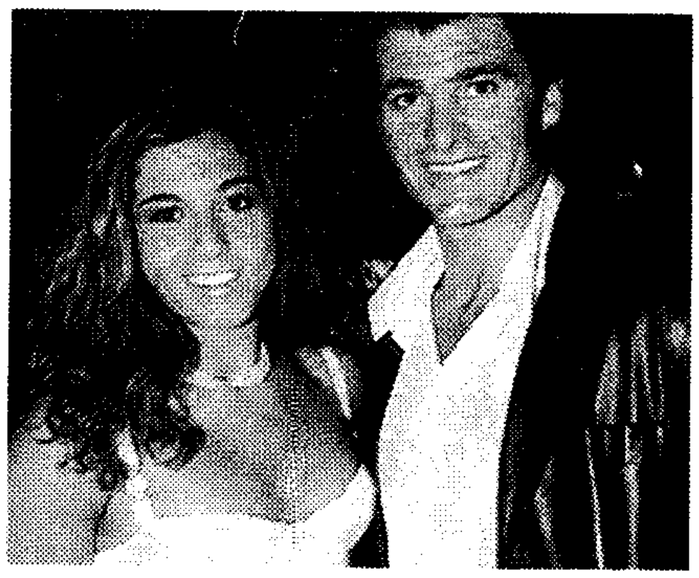


"Mummy said her first word to me today, Nanny"

A MILLION POUNDS UPFRONTERS

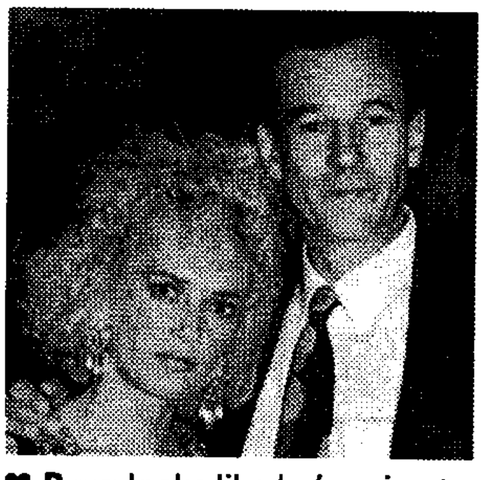
♥ At the Wedding of the Century — *only* Private Eye has the exclusive pictures of Posh 'n' Beck's Day to Remember! ♥

♥ United at last! **Baby Spice** (left) kisses the **Posh** Bride. **Victoria** certainly picked a winner! "It's one **Beck** of a day!" says the groom (middle) as proud **Mum 'n' Dad Beckham** (right) watch him score!!



♥ It's a great Dane out for **Peter Schmeichel**! And who's that he's hoping to get between the Bed Posts? Why, it's **Sporty Spice**, of course, who's hoping he'll score! (*You've done that. Ed*)

♥ It's the **Adams Family**! **Posh** (middle) looking happy and **Victoria**-us while her proud Mum and Dad (left and right) wait to see the happy couple sent off! **Becksy** looks like he's going to score tonight! (*I said you've done this one. Ed*)



♥ **Ryan** looks like he's going to get the **Giggs**les with **Scary** on his arm! The Welsh dribbler must be hoping for an early bath this time! Maybe he'll score! (*You're fired. Ed*)

♥ Grin and **Behr** it, **Danni**! (Left) The TV presenter poses with someone from **Emmerdale** (check subs) and two of United's top players (poss **Skollager** and **Oranjeboom** — check). What a Flat Back Four! Surely one of them will score? (*You're hired again. Ed*)

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POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
Joaquin Rodriguez

So. Farewell
Then
Joaquin Rodriguez.

Composer of
Rodriguez's Guitar
Concerto.

As played by
Julian Bream
On Classic-FM.

Da Da Da
Da Da Da Di Da
Da Da Da Da.
Etc.

Yes, that is
How it goes.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

PS: Also Farewell
Bill Owen.

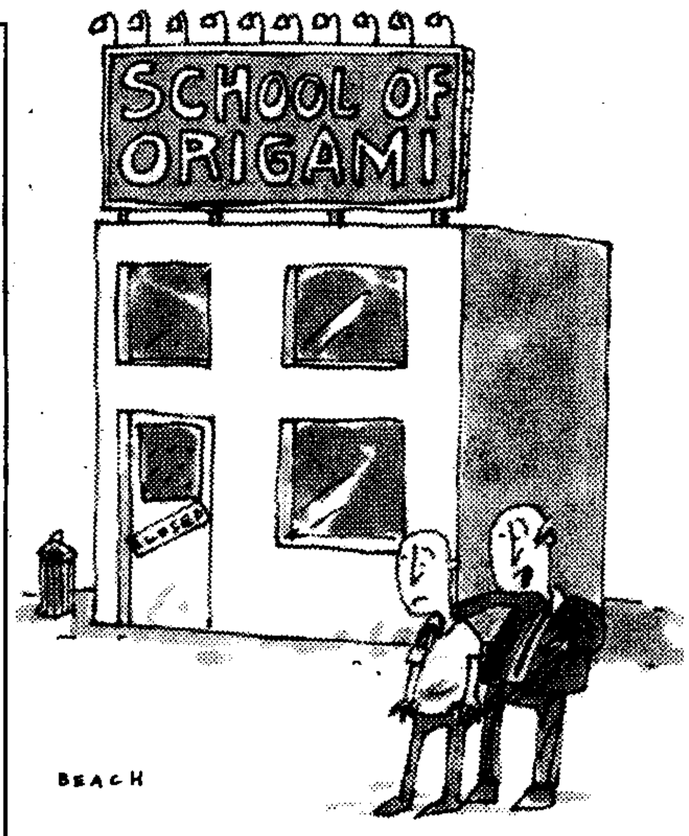
Alias "Compo",
Star of *Last of*
The Summer Wine.
Yes, it really is the last
Now.

Except for the
Repeats.

York University Gives Honorary Degree To Greg Dyke

Citation in full

SALUTAMUS GREGOREM DYKUM, DIRECTORIUS GENERALIS ELECTUS CORPORATI BRITANNICI TRANSMISSIONI ET PER COINCIDENTIA EXTRAORDINARIUS AMICUS DEVOTUS CHRISTOPHERI BLANDI; SUCCESSOR AD JOHANNIS BIRTUS DALEKISSIMUS; INVENTOR CELEBRATUS ROLANDI RATTI, RODENTUS MANIPULATUS POPULARIS, QUI SALVAVIT TELEVISIONEM ANTE-MERIDIONALIS; DONOR MAGNANIMUS MLV LIBRI AD NOVUM LABOREM PARTIAM DI ANTONINUS BLAIRUS MAXIMUS. ET IAM DEDIT MAGNAM PECUNIAM AD UNIVERSITATE EBORICO, ALMA MATER, ET QUID PRO QUO, DEDERUNT DYKUM HONORIS DOCTORIS ABSURDUS ET (CONT. P. XCIV)



"I'm afraid the business has folded"

JULIE BURCHILL: BRITAIN'S WORST WRITER?

(Surely 'Mother'? Ed.)

A NATIONAL newspaper yesterday accused Julie Burchill of being the worst writer in Britain today, accusing her of neglecting her columns and adding that she wasn't fit to bring up any issue at all.

The controversial accusation was greeted with derision by her current partner, Mr Alan Rusbridger, who said: "It is clearly a nonsense to say that Julie is the worst writer in the country today – let's face it, she isn't even the worst writer in today's Guardian if the truth be told."

(Rotters)

HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW

GLYNDEBOURNE
DARLING! YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN THERE!
LOOK! ISN'T THAT, YOU KNOW, SHE USEDTO RUN THE COUNTRY... YOU MUST KNOW..MRS T....
I KNOW DARLING, IT'S OUR SILLY ENGLISH SUMMERS
MY TINY HAND IS FROZEN!
YOU SEE THEY HAVENT FORGOTTEN ME
WHITE WINE
HELP-↑ BUL TRANS-LATION
VINO BIANCO
THANK GOD, WE DONT HAVE TO SING FOR OUR SUPPER
ISN'T THAT THE APPALLING GREG DYKE!
THEY LOOK LIKE THE SORT OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE TO BUY THEIR OWN TICKETS!
HENRY MOORES PICNICKINGWOMAN
@*!OI! LEAVE IT OUT!
ISN'T THAT TIM, ROBIN, PETER, RONALD, JAMES...???
THE MAN WHO DIDN'T WEAR A BLACK TIE AND D.J.
BLOODY CLIP ON BOW TIES!
I'M SINGING IN THE RAIN
IT'S A JOKE DARLING!
YOU SHOULD GO TO ALDEBURGH FIREWORKS ON THE BEACH...
MOVERS & SHAKERS
A MILLION K
BLA! BLA!
BLA! BLA!
BAA! BAA! BAA!
MMM
WHERES THE LOO?
'MADAM, I'M NOT A SHEPHERD!
NOT HERE JOHNNY!
HEATH

DIARY

MATTHEW COLLINGS

Not such a bad place to start really

You've got to start somewhere. So it might as well be here. But is here better than there? There might be just as good. OK, let's start there. It's probably just the same. Only different.

What's it all about then?

Hi! Me again! I've just written my first paragraph. The one beginning "Not such a bad place to start really". So that's one less to write. And to read. But we're still a long way from the end. Of course, you could skip. But that would be breaking the rules. Or is breaking the rules what it's all about, nowadays, in the modern world, *now*? Hey!

This is Modern Art

Whoops! Forgot to tell you. I'm wearing my art critic hat now. This is me. This is my take on the world. This is my journey into nothingness and back again via something. Or other.

Yup.

I'm a pretty crazy kinda guy.

So let's talk about art. Three letters. A. R. and T. It's not tar. It's not rat. It's not tra or atr or rta. It's art. So what's it all about then?

Look at this:

Now look harder. You're probably saying, "Hey! That's just a full-stop. I've seen one of those before!"

But that just goes to show how stupid you are. This particular full stop is a scale copy of an original created by the major conceptual technominimalist Hans Orff in his warehouse in Detroit. Orff has been creating full stops, some of them over twenty yards in diameter, for the past twenty-five years.

Orff's full stops are black. Very black. As black as the blackest bit of black, or even blacker.

And they are circular, like the world.

And that black, black circle says a lot about death, it says a lot about modern anxiety, it says a lot about our whole concept of what kind of concept a concept really is, it says a lot about everything and a lot about nothing. And it says a helluva lot about the here and now.

Hey! Let's take another look at it:

.

It could be an eye. It could be an arsehole. It could be the void. And it could be a crazy modern world spinning out of control. Either way, it's shattering. Or something.

In fact, it reminds me of a full stop created by Samuel Beckett in Krapp's Last Tape. And another one created by Alain Robbe-Grillet in Look Up Name Of Difficult French Novel And Put It In Later.

It says a lot about the impossibility of saying a lot. And it says a lot about the impossibility of saying a lot. Whoops. I just said that.

Or did I?

Just about halfway now

I went to the opening of the new installation by Gary Bowgus. The room had six cars in it, all shiny new and pointing outwards, as if somehow desperate to get into the fresh air, to escape into – what? – the big outside. But they were prevented from escaping by a huge sheet of glass, stretching from the floor to the ceiling, right along the front of the room.

The cars were empty. But they all had steering wheels. It seemed to me to be a very, very powerful statement about our modern world, its surfaces, its feel, the sheer look of it, about the thinginess of things and the carness of cars, about the way we are all steering towards something yet at the same time we're not even behind the wheel, a very good, very nice, very good, whoops said that, very real comment about the singularity of single things, almost playful in its intensity yet at the same time childlike in its conceptualisation of post-ironic distance.

"Excuse me, sir."

It was the Commissionaire, interrupting me as I was taking my notes.

"If you want the art gallery it's next door. This is the car showroom."

Wow!

What is Gillian Wearing?

It's shocking because it's real. And reality is what we're avoiding. Where's that thought leading me now? It's leading me to Tracey Emin, the undisputed leader of radical radicalism in the second half of 1999.

Matthew: Tracey, this looks really interesting. I like its texture, its colour, the way it catches the light. It's telling me a lot about the aboutness of about. But what exactly is it, would you say, how would you put it into words?

Tracey: It's, like, dental-floss. And it's used. Basically, Matthew, it's a piece of, like, used dental-floss. Burp.

Matthew: To me it has an incredible, almost dental sort of flossiness to it. What's it saying, then? Well, to me, it says a lot about floss and a lot about dentals. It reminds me of early Velazquez, who also dealt in teeth, yet it's still very much in tune with nowadays. It asks questions about the past like, "When did I last floss my teeth?" and questions about the future, too, like, "When will I next floss my teeth?" Blimey! I'm trying to get my head around all these questions about *time*. Tell me, Tracy, this whole question of time, what's the next big question you're going to ask about time?

Tracey: Intit about time you pissed off? Burp.

Almost finished

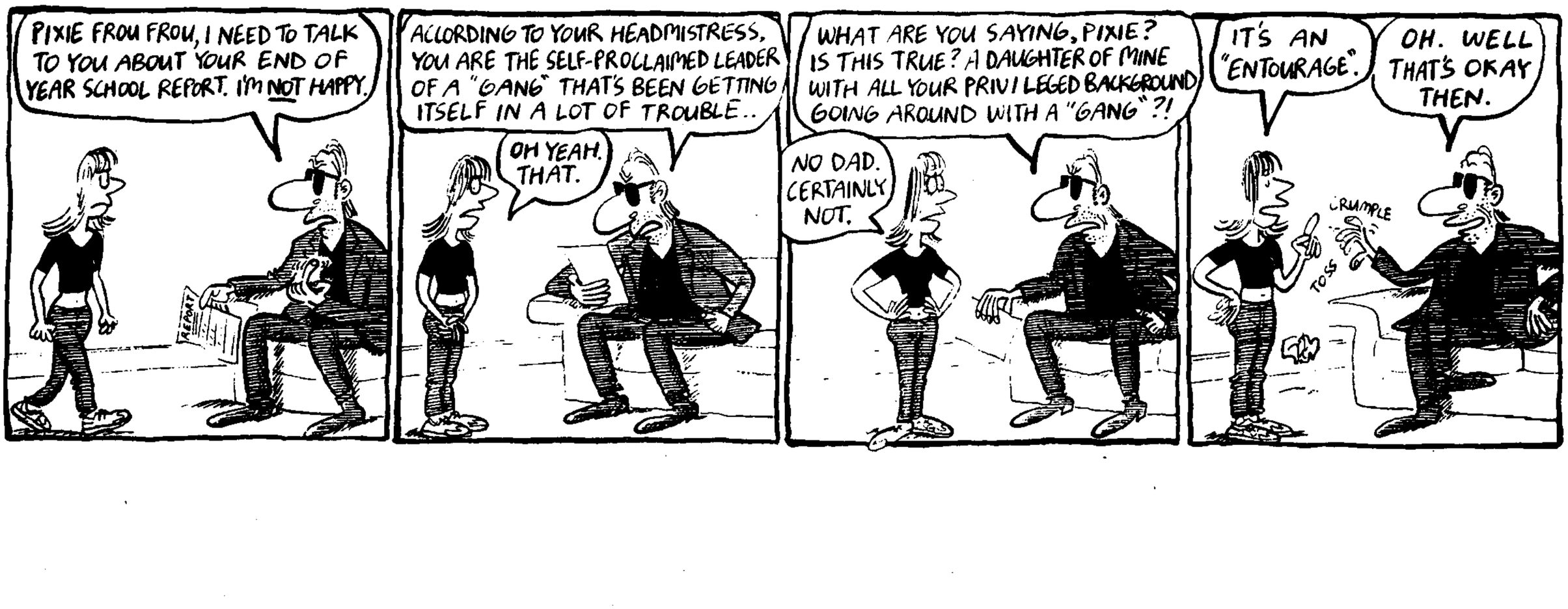
The year: 1999. The time: now. The place: here. The mood: up-to-the-minute. You're thinking, "Has he run out of things to say?" And I'm thinking, "Yeah, right, I have." And that's a perfectly good question and a perfectly valid response.

Sit back. Enjoy yourself. Play an old Velvet Underground record. Chill out. Be cool. Grab yourself a glass of Tequila. Hang loose. No worries. Ask the big questions.

Yeah, baby: This is Modern Art.

Celeb

LIGGER


PIXIE FROU FROU, I NEED TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT YOUR END OF YEAR SCHOOL REPORT. I'M NOT HAPPY.
REPORT
ACCORDING TO YOUR HEADMISTRESS, YOU ARE THE SELF-PROCLAIMED LEADER OF A "GANG" THAT'S BEEN GETTING ITSELF IN A LOT OF TROUBLE..
OH YEAH. THAT.
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, PIXIE? IS THIS TRUE? A DAUGHTER OF MINE WITH ALL YOUR PRIVILEGED BACKGROUND GOING AROUND WITH A "GANG"?!
NO DAD. CERTAINLY NOT.
IT'S AN "ENTOURAGE".
OH. WELL THAT'S OKAY THEN.
CRUMPLE
TOSS

Literary Review

Stanley knifed

Eyes Wide Open: A Memoir of Stanley Kubrick and 'Eyes Wide Shut'
Frederic Raphael (sorry, Oscar-winning screenwriter Frederic Raphael)
(Orion, £12.99)

WE ALL KNOW the feeling. Someone starts telling you about how badly or stupidly somebody else has behaved to them. To prove their point they tell you just what this other person did or said. But even this small amount of direct description is enough to make you realise that it was the other person who was in the right – and the twit badgering you who got it all wrong. And he still doesn't know it.

Frederic Raphael's much-trumpeted memoir of Stanley Kubrick amounts to nothing more than this experience writ large. It is intended, like everything else Frederic Raphael has ever written, primarily to show you just how clever and successful Frederic Raphael is – and, in this case, how a certain Stanley Kubrick failed to appreciate him at his full worth. It achieves entirely the opposite effect. Raphael's conceit, even by his own account, is so intolerable that you wonder why Kubrick put up with him at all.

Other than that it's a dull memoir of cinema hackery, more interesting than a story about a big plumbing job, but less entertaining than a vet's case-notes or a lawyer's yarns.

In 1994, Kubrick sent Raphael a photocopy of Arthur Schnitzler's mucky novella *Dream Story* and commissioned him to turn it into a screenplay. Raphael set to work and over the next two years produced many different versions of the script, talking them through with Kubrick mostly on the phone and meeting him, in his house near St Albans, three times. At their last meeting, Kubrick revealed that he had reduced Raphael's "hundreds of pages" to an 85-page prose narrative "not written in film script form at all". It was this version, revised again by Raphael, that Kubrick then filmed with Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise to make the turkey coming soon to a cinema near you.

To make sure the story goes his way, Raphael has written much of it as if it, too, were a film script, complete with dialogue, scene setting and stage directions. It's a grossly manipulative way to present a memoir. Unless Raphael taped all the conversations, or has perfect recall, he has systematically put words in the mouths of other people, principally Kubrick himself, who are no longer here to deny that they spoke them.

Throughout Raphael's career he has conceived of the main purpose of life as scoring points off people, in the course of supposedly witty repartee. You can see why he could not resist this method of infallibly giving himself the best lines all the time. But it makes nauseating reading. Kubrick rings Raphael up after sending him the original story. "*S.K:* 'Freddie? This is Stanley. Did you have time to read it yet?' *F.R:* 'Only twice'."

At another point he has Kubrick gasping in amazement at Raphael's ability as a creative writer to make things up out of his own head. S.K asks "How did you do that?" F.R. tells him. "How long did it take you?" says the awe-struck Kubrick. "Maybe an hour, but I'm never going to tell you that," says the modest genius. Their final conversation opens with Kubrick simply saying to him: "You can really do this stuff, can't you?" Now who wrote that line?

Even with this complete control of the script, Raphael still can't govern his pathetic obsession with seeming smart. It's his only motor as a writer. At the age of 68, he still begins his jacket bio: "He was educated at Charterhouse and St John's College, Cambridge where he was a major scholar in classics." To make sure we get the message, he mentions this important information in the text too, that he was "as they used to say, 'elected' to a major scholarship". And he drops little foreign phrases and classical tags into his prose all the time, to show you just what a scholar he still is. Being a scriptwriter is "playing the Sisyphus part". Kubrick, he says, is "an Odysseus". A Daedalus. A Proteus. "Eurystheus to my Herakles". What a happy day it is for Raphael when Kubrick asks him if he has read Caesar's *Gallic Wars*. "*F.R:* Stanley, I read it in Latin when I was nine years old. I lie. I may have been 10. Possibly 11 by the end." Coo!

In no time, Raphael has decided that though Kubrick may be his employer, he's barely his equal. He has the blithering fatuity to write in his journal: "Cinematically, I have no doubt that he is a master. However, I have little fear that he is intellectually beyond my reach; I am not even sure how bright he is." So he takes it upon himself to give Kubrick a series of excruciating "tutorials". His stage direction for Kubrick's final appearance reads: "STANLEY comes in. Can he be seen as the bearded pupil coming to see his tutor? Why not."

We're all stuck in our pasts – but some of us more than others. Sometimes Raphael is back at Charterhouse, as when he switches the film's setting from Vienna to New York. "It seemed that I could still work the old trick whereby, as a schoolboy, I had transposed the 18th century letters of Junius into Ciceronian prose. *Mutatis mutandis* was the slogan to keep in mind..." Sometimes he's back at Cambridge. Wonderfully, he envisages the ideal room for the orgy scenes in *Eyes Wide Shut* thus: "I had in mind a large room rather like the old library St John's College, Cambridge, in which there were 'bays' with table for study."

Eyes Wide Open is made bearable only by the inadvertent glimpses we get of Kubrick's real opinion of Raphael: low. He tells Raphael, to his chagrin, he doesn't want any of his jokes. He says: "The dialogue goes boom-boom... and I don't want that." And then in the end he re-does all Raphael's work. "He had indeed digested my work, but its shape and much of its detail were there in his rescript," Raphael consoles himself.

He still yearns for those glittering prizes. But *Eyes Wide Open* proves only that Raphael is a prize prat.

Books & Bookmen

■ THE withdrawal of Donald MacIntyre's *Mandelson* by HarperCollins, following the threat of legal action from John Booth, Mandy's former deputy at Walworth Road, could provide a boost to Paul Routledge, whose rather less detailed *Mandy* was published by Simon & Schuster in January.

At the launch for Nick Cohen's *Cruel Britannia*, a tired and emotional Routy was spied crying into his drink about the advantages enjoyed by his rival. When asked about sales of *Mandy*, he admitted "it's not going well", adding that "MacIntyre has stolen my thunder. He had Mandelson's co-operation, and had material that I could never have known about." On the subject of the paperback, due in October, Routledge was gloomy. "There's a little extra material, but not much," he confessed. Perhaps he'll cheer up somewhat now that MacIntyre's effort is languishing in the warehouse pending the outcome of Booth's complaint, giving *Mandy* a clear run in the shops.

■ ACCORDING to comments made recently in the *Bookseller* by former W. H. Smug executive Bing Taylor in his capacity as chairman of the London Festival of Literature board, "everybody wants to see the festival happen again". Presumably, though, the event's creditors are less enthusiastic, the whole affair having racked up debts of £55,000 during its 10-day duration in March. One single event, which the naïve Taylor had been assured "could not fail", lost £15,000.

Taylor's association with such a financial fiasco can only have been an embarrassment to Anthony "Fatty" Cheetham, who, almost simultaneously, announced the appointment of old Bing as MD of Orion's new history imprint, Phoenix Press. Nothing, it seems, succeeds like failure.

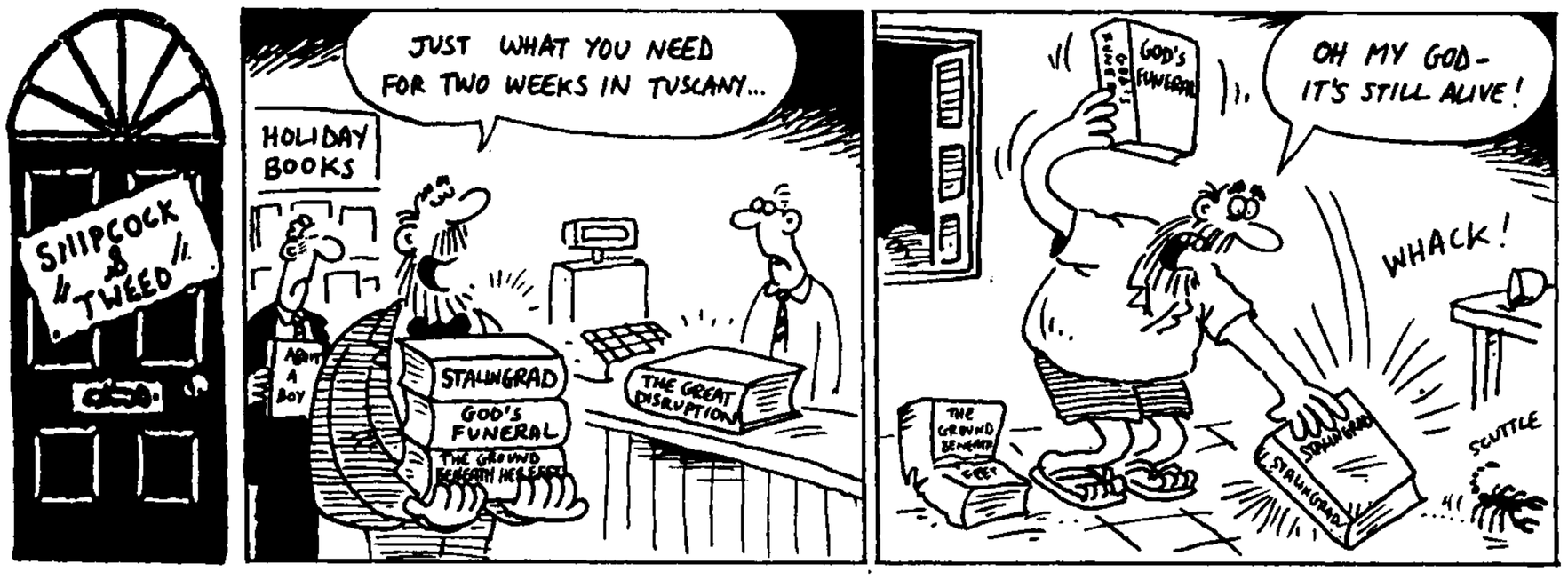
■ BOUTROS BOUTROS-GHALI is a truly global thinker. Speaking to a surprisingly large audience (tourists with nothing better to do) at a book store on London's Oxford Street on 15 July to promote his newly published account of his time at the UN, *Unvanquished*, he said that a shift away from the present focus on the West is imperative.

"We are all affected by Eurocentric attitudes. We all look to Europe and America as the centre of the world. The great powers pay attention to their own interest."

His laudable desire to push the UN to do more for Africa and Asia led to a certain lack of tact during the war in Bosnia. Boutros-Ghali told Sarajevans at the height of the siege: "You have a situation that is better than ten other places in the world – I can give you a list."

One of his main aims in *Unvanquished* is to settle old scores with US foreign secretary Madeleine Albright. In his diplomatic description he paints Albright as a smiling serpent who says: "I will make Boutros think I am his friend; then I will break his legs!" He plays the innocent: "I was a good boy, but I was naïve. Fortune is a woman, Machiavelli said, and should be treated roughly, but in this case it was the woman who was rough and fortune favoured her."

When it was suggested to Boutros at his book launch that Albright's animosity towards him was that of a woman scorned, he avoided any hint of sexual chemistry (on her part at least) by discursing at length about improved gender equality while he was secretary-general.



IN THE BACK

LAWRENCE INQUIRY

The law of the bungle

LAST WEEK'S decision, taken in private by a metropolitan police tribunal, to clear Detective Inspector Ben Bullock of all but two of 28 disciplinary charges, means that no officer will, in effect, be punished for letting Stephen Lawrence's killers go free. The others have all retired or been given "words of admonishment". Mr Bullock, who was second-in-command, can expect the same.

It all serves to make a mockery of the costly nine-month investigation, carried out for the police complaints authority by Kent police, which formed the basis of the disciplinary action. The report makes frightening reading. It reveals such wholesale failure and missed opportunities – from the handling of evidence and witnesses, through to the interrogation of the suspects – that it is easy to see why the Lawrence family believe there is more behind it than the "bungling" of a few "institutionalised racists" (see *Eye* 971).

The Kent report revealed that within hours of Stephen's murder in Eltham, south-east London, in 1993, a skinhead had come forward with "possibly vital information". That was the names of three prime suspects, brothers Neil and Jamie Acourt and David Norris, and details of four other vicious attacks by the gang, who called themselves "the Krays". Yet there was no attempt to question the man, nicknamed "James Grant", for 24 hours. There was never any attempt to discover the source of his information, whether he was linked to the suspects or whether he matched any of the descriptions given by independent witnesses to the murder.

The next day an anonymous letter was found in a phonebox, appearing to confirm some of the details given by "Grant". But no one tried to trace the author. There was no public appeal and no checks made to BT to see if any calls were made from the box at that time. Later a police officer witnessed a man depositing a similar note on a police car windscreen, but he made no attempt to speak to him.

According to the report, in the same 48 hours, an anonymous female called the police three times. She appeared to corroborate what "Grant" had said and indicated she was very close to the prime suspects. She, too, gave details of another attack – the stabbing in the chest of a man called Stacey Benefield. No attempt was made to trace her. Mr Benefield was traced, however, and he confirmed that he had been knifed by Norris, encouraged by Neil Acourt.

In short, within 48 hours of Stephen's murder, Scotland Yard had information from three different sources naming four prime suspects (they now also been given had Gary Dobson's details). They also had first-hand evidence that two of them were behind at least one other knife attack in the area.

According to Kent police the Met had enough evidence to arrest the suspects, but instead a decision was made to put them under surveillance. In failing to arrest Norris and Neil Acourt in particular, they had passed up a "golden opportunity" to find forensic evidence, scupper alibis, prevent intimidation of witnesses and give eye-witnesses a chance of identification while their memories were fresh.

The attempts at surveillance were something of a joke. On two occasions a civilian cameraman watched as suspects left their homes with plastic sacks containing clothes and other property. The cameraman had no telephone to alert any of the investigating officers, so possibly vital evidence was lost. He only managed to catch one of the men on film. Not all the suspects' houses were watched and there were no regular briefings between the surveillance team and the incident room.

Of eight eye-witnesses, including Stephen's close friend and companion Duwayne Brooks, only three were ever asked to complete a photo-fit or give an artist's impression. Even then there was a delay of 12 days, when memories were not so fresh and when it was too late for an urgent appeal to the public.

Five of those eyewitnesses, including Duwayne Brooks, had described a fair haired offender. "Grant" had also said there was an unidentified blond youth present at the attack. Although all the named suspects had dark hair, police never bothered trying to trace the mystery fair-haired attacker.

In fact Kent are scathing of the way other suspects were so easily discarded from police inquiries. Eight key associates of Norris and the Acourts were ruled out merely on the say-so of family or friends. One with fair hair – and named by a police informant – claimed he was in a pub. His file was marked "no further action", without his alibi being checked. Another, who was found to have given an alibi for the wrong night, was also eliminated from inquiries. Kent concludes there was no consistent approach and a number of suspects were not properly eliminated.

Kent are also critical of the failure to take full and proper forensic evidence from the scene, from Stephen Lawrence's body and from Duwayne Brooks. Blood-stained tissues recovered from nearby gardens were among a mass of material that amazingly was never forensically tested.

When arrests were finally made on 7 May (15 days after the murder) and the suspects' homes searched, there was no instruction to look for anything other than bloodstained or recently cleaned clothing and weapons. Despite information that some of the suspects had been seen washing their hair after the murder, there was no instruction to look for blood traces on bed linen or towels, or shampoo bottles and sinks. Neither was there any instruction to search under floor-boards, even though police had been informed that this was where they usually hid their weapons. When the prime suspects were eventually arrested, their interrogations were "unplanned, shallow, uncoordinated and lacking objective".

The litany of failure goes on and on. But the tribunal found Mr Bullock, the right-hand man to the investigation, guilty only of failing to brief officers about searching under floorboards for knives and failing to properly investigate the source of an anonymous letter.

Because the tribunal sits in secret, we do not know on what evidence Mr Bullock was cleared of the 26 other charges – or indeed the details of those charges. Perhaps the panel, chaired by deputy assistant commissioner, Des Flanders, opted for the rather generous assessment of Mr Bullock offered by the Macpherson inquiry, which concluded that the "major responsibility lies with those who allowed Mr Bullock to occupy a position which was beyond his abilities".

What is clear is that while operating out of his depth Mr Bullock allocated several key and sensitive tasks to his sergeant, John Davidson, including the handling of "Grant", interviews with two potential, but frightened young witnesses and the interrogation of Dobson.

Last month it emerged that Davidson had been arrested by the Yard's anti-corruption squad in connection with their investigation into a drug ring. But a Yard spokeswoman told the Eye that he has since been "de-arrested" – his file has been marked "no further action". Just like so many others.

ALBUMIN DANGER

Bad blood

A YEAR after research first suggested a blood product routinely given to critically ill patients since the Second World War might kill rather than cure, the government has finally taken action.

Its committee on the safety of medicines has quietly sent out a warning to doctors to restrict the use of human albumin – a blood product used to treat people suffering serious burns, injury or shock – and demanded that the product carry health warnings.

The move came after a study last year by the Cochrane Injuries Group suggested that albumin use might be resulting in between 600 and 1200 unnecessary deaths a year in the UK and that the seriously ill stood a better chance if they were transfused with saline alternatives.

Bad news for the pharmaceutical and plasma products industry, which makes a fortune from £35-a-bottle albumin – about 30 times as much as saline. Unfortunately, it seems, that albumin has never been properly tried and tested before it was licensed. It came in through the back door after a doctor used it on seven badly burned American victims at Pearl Harbor, who all recovered. The perceived wisdom was that high blood levels of albumin would draw water into the circulation and restore damaged tissue. In fact in the seriously ill, albumin can leak out of the circulation and take water with it – which can be particularly dangerous when it gets into the lungs.

What the Cochrane team found by reviewing 23 randomised trials of 1400 critically ill patients was that a pattern of increased mortality was emerging as far back as 1983. But each trial on its own was considered too small to be of significant value.

Even now the CSM has concluded there is insufficient evidence of harm to warrant withdrawal of albumin products from the market and says there needs to be a large purpose-designed trial to answer the questions over the effect of albumin on mortality.

Fortunately for patients, however, doctors, have been quicker to respond. Sales in the UK have dropped by up to a half since the research was originally published a year ago.

POISONED FARMERS

Unlucky dip

FOR SEVEN YEARS one of the biggest potential time-bombs under the Maffia has been the damage caused to the health of thousands of sheep farmers by exposure to organo-phosphorus sheep dips, the use of which Maff made compulsory between 1976 and 1992.

What terrifies ministers and officials is the thought of compensation cases running into hundreds of millions of pounds against both the government and the chemical firms which made the OPs. It has therefore been vital, firstly, to deny on every possible occasion that there was any link between OPs and illness in farmers; and, secondly, to ensure that no scientific study should produce proof the courts could not ignore.

Last month a mighty hole was blown in this official cover-up.

A report by the Edinburgh institute of occupational medicine came up with precisely the evidence the government had been dreading. This confirmed that exposure to OP dips does indeed inflict such serious long-term damage that the incidence of nerve damage among sheep farmers is 90 percent higher than in the general population. What made this even worse was that the study had been funded by Maff itself.

This should have given a tremendous fillip to the hundreds of farmers who, for years, have been wanting to sue both the government and the multi-national chemical firms which make the OPs. But the story of what has been happening to these legal actions gets more and more mysterious.

Until 1997 the firm acting for most of these farmers was Leigh Day which, despite spending huge quantities of taxpayers' money in legal aid, had not managed to get a single case into court. But in that year the legal aid board ruled that all compensation cases involving sheep dip, gulf war injuries and multi-vaccines should be lumped together in three massive contracts, all of which should be handled by one solicitor, Richard Barr, a partner in a small law firm in Kings Lynn, Dawbarns. In 1998 Barr moved to London, bringing the three contracts with him, to join Hodge, Jones, Allen, the senior partner of which happens to be Henry Hodge, deputy-chairman of the legal aid board and also a prominent member of the association of labour lawyers and husband of junior

minister Margaret Hodge. Obviously to win three legal aid contracts potentially worth tens of millions of pounds was a great financial coup for Hodge, Jones, Allen, although Barr was anxious to deny that there was any link whatever with the firm's connection to the legal aid board. "There is no cause for concern here at all," he wrote. Suspicious journalists "will not find anything salacious because there is nothing to find". Now, however, Barr has mysteriously left HJA, leaving his lucrative sheep dip contract behind.

At the end of last year it was ruled in the high court that all sheep dip cases must be heard as a single action, and last month Master Miller asked for any further potential claimants to make sure their cases were lodged by September with HJA or with a Plymouth firm which has been brought in to assist.

No doubt the government and the chemical companies will be awaiting the outcome of the case when it finally reaches court with particular interest. But it certainly cannot displease them that the whole future of this mass of compensation claims – so far more than 300 victims have come forward – now rests on just one single case. The manufacturers have almost limitless funds available to fight the case. In 1997, when an American musician won an earlier OP case in Hong Kong, legal sources estimated that one of the defendants Ciba-Geigy, now Novartis, spent £35m.

But even if the victims win, their lawyers say maximum compensation for each individual will be no more than £100,000.

Thanks to the generosity of the legal aid board, it seems likely the reward for the lawyers involved will be at least 100 times that sum.

SECURITY FIASCO

£40m down the drain

FRIDAY 28 January 1999 was a rotten day in the life of Mr Kevin Tebbit, the high-flying permanent secretary at the ministry of defence.

Mr Tebbit spent most of the day anxiously poring over the papers of Operation Trawlerman, an ambitious scheme for a new computer system to store the ministry's intelligence information. The following Monday Mr Tebbit and other top officials from the ministry were due to answer questions about Trawlerman at the house of commons public accounts committee – the MPs' watchdog over government spending. Mr Tebbit knew he was in for a hard time. Operation trawlerman was hatched in the late 1980s, the days of Thatcher, Reagan and star wars, when governments on both sides of the Atlantic were hypnotised by spies. Some genius at the MoD – no one knows who – came up with the brilliant idea of a "stand alone" computerised system in which all the information on intelligence known to the British MoD would be stored separately, entirely secure from all other computer systems and intelligence gatherers. The idea caused enormous excitement among ministry spooks and the growing army of fat cat suppliers of "information technology" to the MoD.

In February 1988 the normally parsimonious treasury agreed to splash out £32.1m of taxpayers' money on the project. In July Data Sciences Ltd, a subsidiary of Thorn EMI, was contracted to set up the new system by 1991. They would be a paid a "firm price" of £32.1m.

By 1991 the project had hardly been started. When it was finally handed over to the ministry four years late in 1995, it was entirely useless. Not only was the information out of date, but the very fact that it was stored separately from all other intelligence information – from European countries, for instance – made it obsolete. In November 1996 the system was abandoned. A terse note appeared in the MoD accounts writing off £34.6m of taxpayers' money. This came to the attention of the commons public accounts committee, which summoned Mr Tebbit and his team to answer for the disaster.

No wonder Mr Tebbit was anxious. To his horror, he realised that the Trawlerman fiasco was far more expensive than anyone had yet imagined. He was intrigued and irritated by the difference in the figures set down as a "firm price" for Trawlerman (£32.1m) and the amount charged to the taxpayer (£34.6m). He knew that the new expression "firm price contract" had replaced the old "fixed price contract" which had been so systematically "bent" to the advantage of the big supplying companies, and to the disadvantage of the taxpayer. "Firm price contract", as Mr Tebbit confirmed over and over again to the committee, meant what it said. It meant that the contract price could not be changed. So how had the price for the obsolete Trawlerman contract grown by £2.5m?

Try as he could, as he puzzled over the papers that Friday evening, Mr Tebbit could not solve this mystery. He found to his horror, moreover, that the Trawlerman accounts were jumbled up with accounts for other work done by Data Sciences for the ministry: fibre-optic cabling in the old war office building, for instance, and substantial new information technology in the ministry itself. It looked almost certain that large sums of money had been diverted from the Trawlerman account to other Data Sciences accounts. Terrified that these "mistakes" might be revealed under questions from the public accounts committee MPs, Mr Tebbit decided to come clean: "I am not absolutely certain," he told David Davis MP, chairman of the committee, "that the amount of money expended was given or that the amounts received back were absolutely precise." The commons and the public had been deceived.

By how much? The wretched Mr Tebbit could not say. He didn't have "precise" figures to hand. Several weeks later he wrote to the committee with the news that he had now carried out a detailed "review" of the costs of the Trawlerman fiasco. The amount of taxpayers' money poured down the Trawlerman drain to Data Sciences Ltd and its managers who bought out the company in 1991 was not £34.6m, as parliament had been told, but, er, £40.7m – a little error of £6.1m, or 19 percent of the entire value of the "firm price" originally set by the treasury! Because he was explaining all this in a letter after the public hearings, and because the public accounts committee is stuffed with new labour loyalists who are terrified of rocking the boat, neither Mr Tebbit nor anyone else from the ministry has had to answer for this historic example of book-cooking.

WORLD OF SKIING

Slippery slopes

TIM ALCOTT, chairman of the British ski and snowboard federation, isn't the only ski boss with a slightly chiaroscuro record. Since detailing Alcott's multifarious business interests in the last Eye, we have received several letters drawing attention to the slippery antics of Chris Exall, president of the English ski council.

When submitting himself for election at the council's agm in April, Exall very properly declared his interest in two skiing-related companies, which he coyly described as having "ceased trading". In fact, both firms were put into compulsory liquidation owing thousands of pounds to suppliers, some of them prominent sponsors and supporters of British skiing who could ill afford to be shafted by Exall in this way. He conveniently forgot to disclose these details to the agm which, in its ignorance, elected him. Nor did Exall mention that he has at least three county court judgments against him from the past three years, all relating to non-payment of debts – hardly the ideal qualification for a man who negotiates public funding for English skiing from the sports council.

In another slick move, Exall had himself made chairman of the council's coaching committee. Anyone who wants a licence to coach on artificial slopes (the only kind available in England) must have attended a course recognised by Exall's committee. By a strange coincidence, almost all of the ESC-approved courses are now run by a certain Chris Exall, who earns a tidy sum from them.

Exall thus sits on the board which sets the budget for the coaching committee; he leads the committee which spends the budget; and he is a coach on whom much of the budget is spent. The committee then prepares accounts for the budget, and Exall is back on the board just in time to approve them.

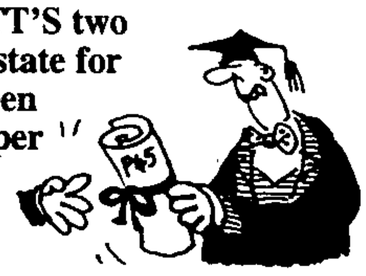
Of course there is no suggestion of wrongdoing, but Exall's fellow board members were none too pleased when they learned the truth of his financial background. Pressure was applied for him to stand down. He initially agreed, saying that he would resign on the day of the adjourned agm in June. Since then, however, he has seemed curiously reluctant to go.

Meanwhile, yet another judgment for unpaid debts was issued against Exall in May, at Newcastle county court. It seems unlikely that the sports council will give any more public money to the ESC until he delivers his long-awaited letter of resignation.

HIGH PRINCIPALS

I see no sleaze

IN DAVID BLUNKETT'S two years as secretary of state for education there have been two reports, a green paper and a white paper, which have claimed to tackle the crisis in further education.



What many in the sector find insulting is that in 84 pages of the white paper on post-16 education, "Learning to Succeed", the following half-sentence is all that is devoted to the problems of sleaze and corruption: "Isolated examples of failure by a few can tarnish the good work of the many."

Readers of this column would be forgiven for thinking that enough isolated examples, when added together, begin to form a pattern – franchising scams, principals suspended pending investigations from the fraud squad, victimisation of whistleblowers and trade unionists.

All the above apply at Cricklade College in Hampshire where the principal, Richard Evans, has been suspended on full pay for the past 17 months. Last year the FEFC ordered Cricklade's governors to commission a report into financial irregularities at the college. Although the report was finished before Christmas it apparently took the governors until last Thursday to discuss the results.

The results of that meeting are still not known because the governors failed to make them public, but are known to concern the £1m deficit that Evans racked up at the college. The college ran into trouble after it began claiming money for students enrolled by a private training company, Extras Ltd. When the South Wales fraud squad pointed out that the students didn't actually exist, Cricklade was forced to close down this lucrative moneyspinner.

Andrew Murray, a lecturer who was sacked after he brought the deficit to the attention of the governors, has now become the centre of a national campaign to end the victimisation of whistleblowers. College lecturers' union, Natfhe, has said it will not negotiate with the association of colleges, which represents college principals, until Murray is reinstated.

● THE EADE clan is fast becoming a regular fixture of this column. The antics of David Eade, former Trotskyist and principal of Barnsley College, his ex-wife Maisie, former hairdresser and head of business studies at Park Lane College, Leeds and her two children, Chris and Sarah Nelson, are fast becoming the stuff of FE legend.

The story so far (See Eyes 978 and 980) is that Progress Training, a company set up by David Eade to run the franchise operations of Barnsley College, lent £21,000 to a surfing magazine run by Maisie's children. Irked by the Eye's suggestion that he had been duped by Eade, who told him the loan was entirely proper, Barnsley Central MP, Eric Illsley is now demanding a full explanation of the loan at the next meeting of the college council at the end of this month.

"It is certainly odd that the money was given to this kind of magazine. There isn't much call for surfing in these parts," he told the Eye. "I will want to know where this money came from, why it was allocated to this company and whether Progress Training has other applications for loans like this."

In the City

"I AM NOT a philanthropist," declared Michael Ashcroft long ago in a galaxy far away before he became the man who liked the Tory party so much that he bought it. But then the graceless Ashcroft is a man who believes in buying – not just companies but yachts, executive jets, models, important people, political parties and even small countries. Every purchase has one goal – the enhancement of Michael Ashcroft's pleasure, wealth and influence.

The current furore over the Tory treasurer will come as no surprise to *Eye* readers, who have had their cards well and truly marked on Ashcroft over many years. But clearly all those years of stepping right up to or even putting one foot over the line are finally starting to catch up with the self styled "buccaneer" who believes "business is like endless war games".

But in the hurricane of recycled cuttings since the Belize bomb went off – primed either by Ashcroft's Tory enemies or Labour special advisors – certain potentially more damaging questions about the Conservatives' biggest benefactor remain unanswered.

Question One: Why was the man who has given £3m to the Tories – the type of "political services" which have resulted in numerous businessmen becoming knights and peers despite the Lloyd George law – refused the peerage he craves? This was clearly a deliberate snub to the socially ambitious Ashcroft, who once said: "The class system works. I support the House of Lords." Yet no reason has emerged, other than possibly his tax exile status.

The Revenue would most certainly have been asked about Ashcroft. Being a tax exile does not mean you cannot be honoured. "Union Jack" Hayward was finally awarded a knighthood, despite his years in the Bahamas, but it took a long time. And the Revenue accepted the emigration for tax purposes of first ADT (then Hawley Group) and then Ashcroft himself. But there are strict rules about how much time Britons who pay no tax here can stay. It is a maximum of 91 days a year. The Revenue, however, does not keep a tight check. And how can it, when a brief jet flight to Guernsey or across the Channel at the end of a full day at Tory party headquarters or those of Ashcroft's Carlisle group would not necessarily count among the 91?

In reality the 91 figure is an honesty box and can effectively be restricted to that number of nights actually spent at a home here. Anyway, exactly how a busy businessman or working peer could carry out his duties and not be in Britain for some part of more than 91 days is less than clear. So is it possibly the case that the Revenue have questions about Ashcroft past or present and, not surprisingly, take a dim view of those who take advantage of the facilities Britain has to offer while seeking by every legal means to ensure they make no personal contribution to the running cost?

The taxman will have no doubt noted that the most recent exercise in Ashcroftian financial engineering has seen the creation of a group of British businesses under the Carlisle banner whose dividends will be paid – probably tax free unless the offshore companies are made UK tax resident – to parent companies in the tax havens of Guernsey and Belize. A structure which will mean any sale by Ashcroft will be UK tax free.

Then there is Belize. Not just Scotland Yard but also Customs and the security services would have been asked whether anything was known about Ashcroft. While there is no evidence that any of these departments have investigated Ashcroft personally it would be amazing if the intelligence collected on Belize as a coming drug trafficking and money laundering centre had not rubbed off on the tiny country's Mr Big. Ashcroft's control of the biggest bank and his half-ownership of the company that not only runs its discredited company and shipping registers but also registers probably the largest number of corporate black holes and floating rust buckets will have brought him to the notice of those charged with fighting the drugs war.

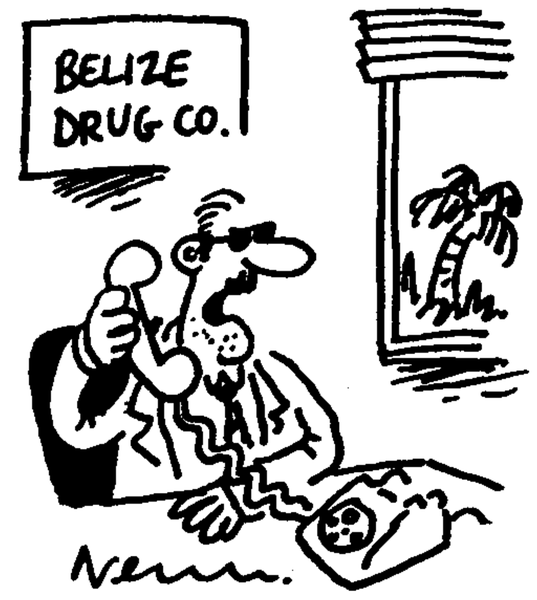
After all Belize the offshore secrecy haven is an Ashcroft creation. Furthermore he regularly boasted of its growth. As BHI Corporation (now Carlisle Holdings) chief executive officer Ashcroft proudly reported on 9 March: "As part of the strong growth in international financial services, the number of international business companies formed increased 175 percent in the nine months compared to the prior year. Belize International Services (the Ashcroft company) continued its strong performance. In the nine months ended 31 January 1999, 2262 companies (up 68 percent) and 675 ships (tonnage up 20 percent) were registered. As at 31 January 1999, there were 9542 companies and 4153 ships registered".

But that growth and the increasing involvement of BIS register companies and ships in drugs deals or money laundering inevitably ensured Ashcroft, BIS and his Belize Bank found their way into the files of not just the US drug enforcement agency, customs, FBI and CIA but also Scotland Yard, the national crime intelligence service and the national crime squad. Even though Ashcroft was not himself a target, all this information cannot have helped answer the question: "Anything known?"

Nor is it viable for Ashcroft to try and slip and slide his way round the Belize problem by saying it is just like the Channel Islands. Jersey and Guernsey have seized assets and provide increasing information to investigators. Local companies have to provide details of beneficial ownership to regulators. Compare this with Ashcroft's Belize, where little or no information has to be provided about its opaque international business companies. And, as the US state department pointed out in February, despite passing anti-money laundering laws in 1996 Belize has yet to seize any assets or bring a prosecution.

Perhaps the greatest vote of no confidence in his creation is Ashcroft's decision last month to sell his BIS shares. If Belize is so clean, why sell – especially when it is clearly such a booming business?

Finally there is the view of Ashcroft which may have been relayed to the honours scrutiny committee from city regulators and the department of timidity & inaction, all of whom have tangled with Ashcroft. A few references from the 1991 DTI report into Blue Arrow may not have helped Ashcroft's cause. The inspectors criticised Ashcroft over several transactions linked to his pal Tony Berry, then running Blue Arrow. They were "unsatisfied by the explanations" Ashcroft gave about a £259,000 invoice. They said there were "disquieting features" about share deals. They accused Ashcroft of breaking company law by not revealing his ownership of Blue Arrow shares held in Berry's name. The inspectors rejected his explanations as "unfounded".



"Don't trust Ashcroft – he has links with the Conservative Party"

The subject of Ashcroft's share deals have long been a subject of comment – often because of his propensity to be both buyer and seller with public companies in between. Ashcroft has long believed that the best way to get the best price is to be on both sides of the deal. Although the 1991 Laidlaw law suit was settled, it left unresolved the basis for the allegations of fraud and misinformation made by the ADT shareholders. Few shareholders made as much money as Ashcroft from buying and selling ADT, as was proved when he sold shares to Laidlaw in 1990 and collected on some well timed options with the Tyco takeover in 1997.

Any or all of these matters could have played a role in the decision to reject Ashcroft's peerage. But there are other questions which need to be asked and answered about the Tory Party's banker...

Question Two: Exactly how much time did Ashcroft spend in Britain during the last tax year?

Question Three: On how many days was he here?

Question Four: Does he pay tax in the United States, where he also has a home?

Question Five: Where – if anywhere – is he resident for tax purposes?

Question Six: What use is made of his Belize diplomatic status to obtain tax or entry privileges in Britain or elsewhere?

Question Seven: When did he go onto the overseas voter register and when was he last on the domestic electoral roll or vote?

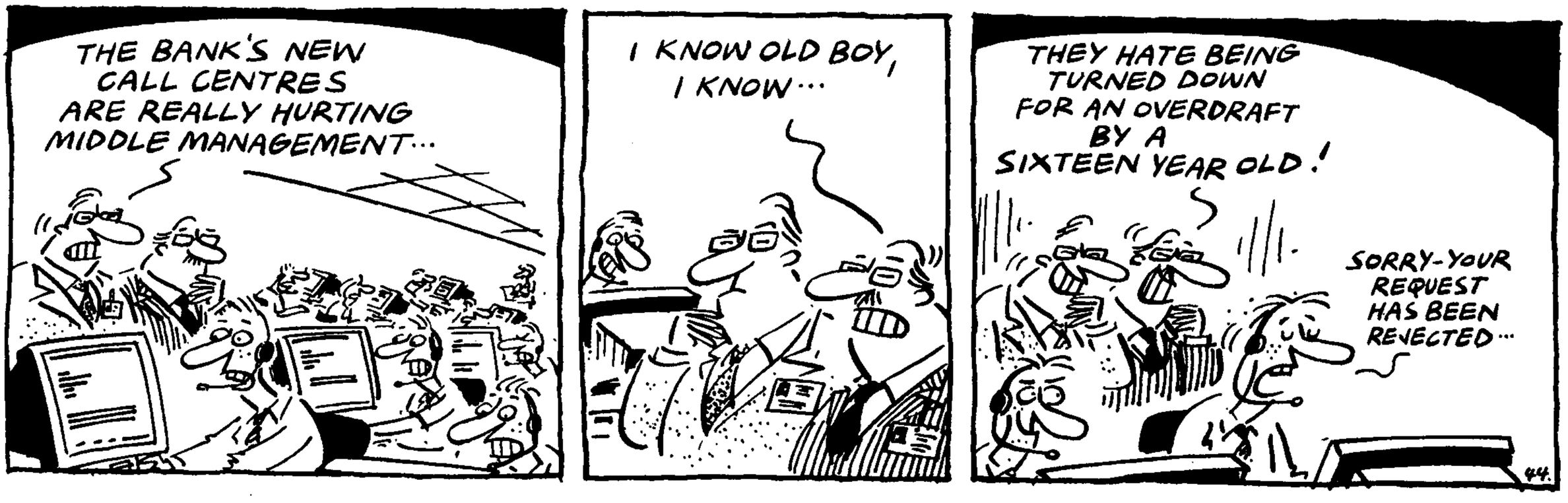
Question Eight: Is his new £1.5m Westminster home owned by an offshore company and why, if not to avoid tax?

Tax rather than sex and drugs (forget rock 'n' roll) is more likely to force Michael Ashcroft's divorce from the Tories. No matter how unfairly, he may feel that he is a victim of Dr Johnson's maxim that "where secrecy goes, roguery is not far behind". But then as Ashcroft himself said: "There are some boxes that are not necessarily best opened."

'Slicker'

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE/RIGG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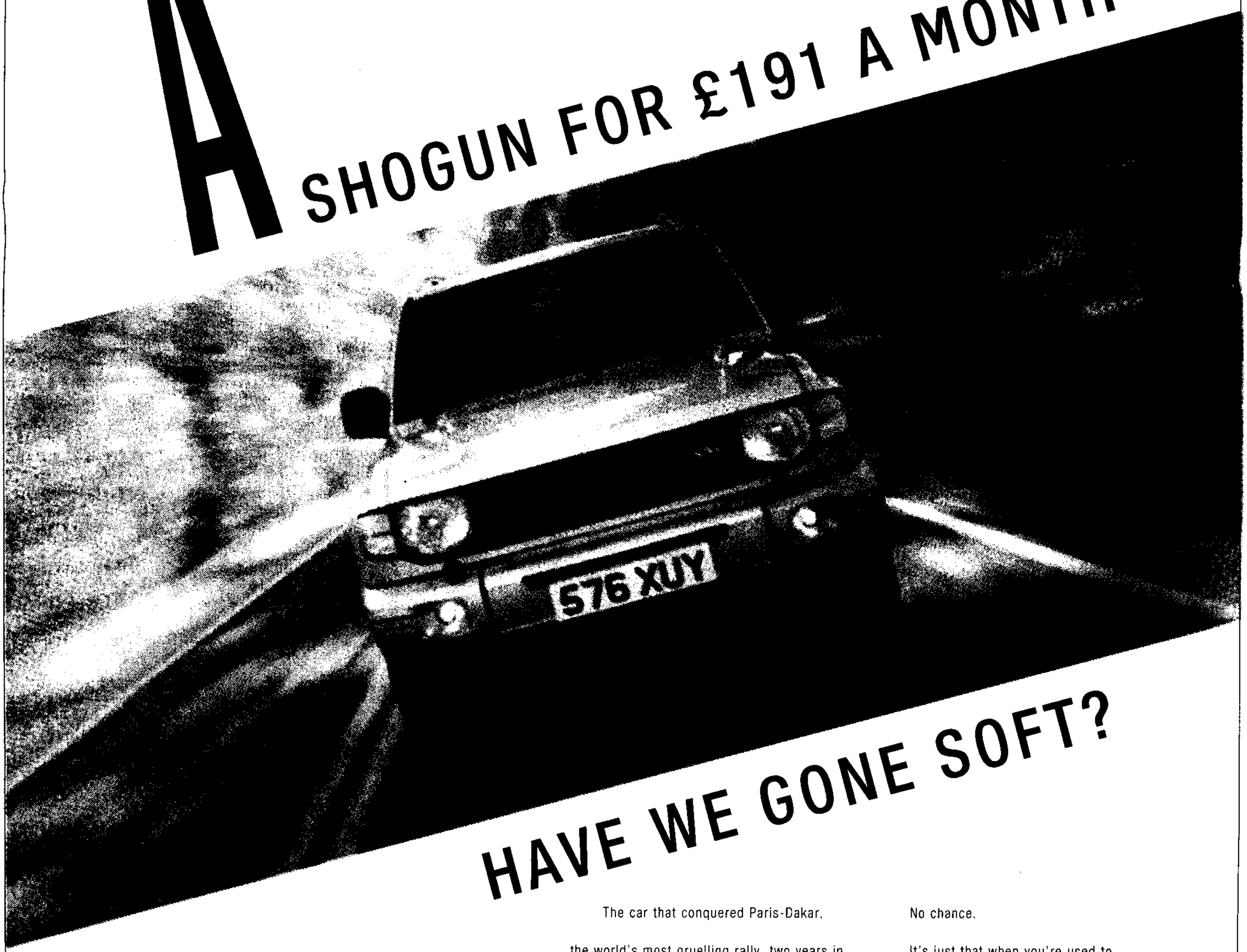

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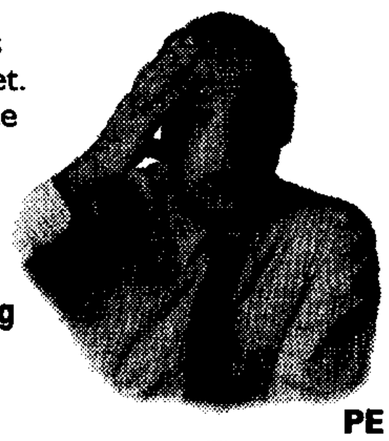

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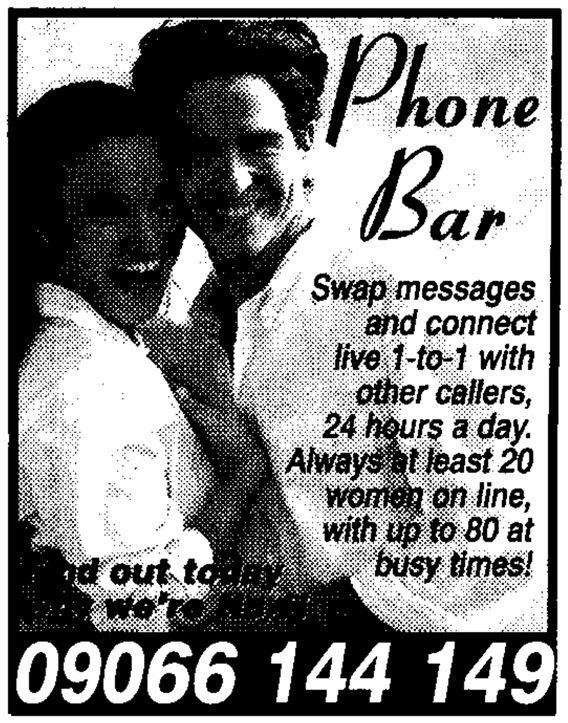
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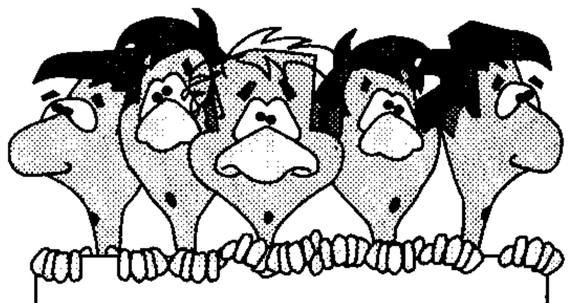
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SPEECHWRITING by Mitch Murray – see page 31...

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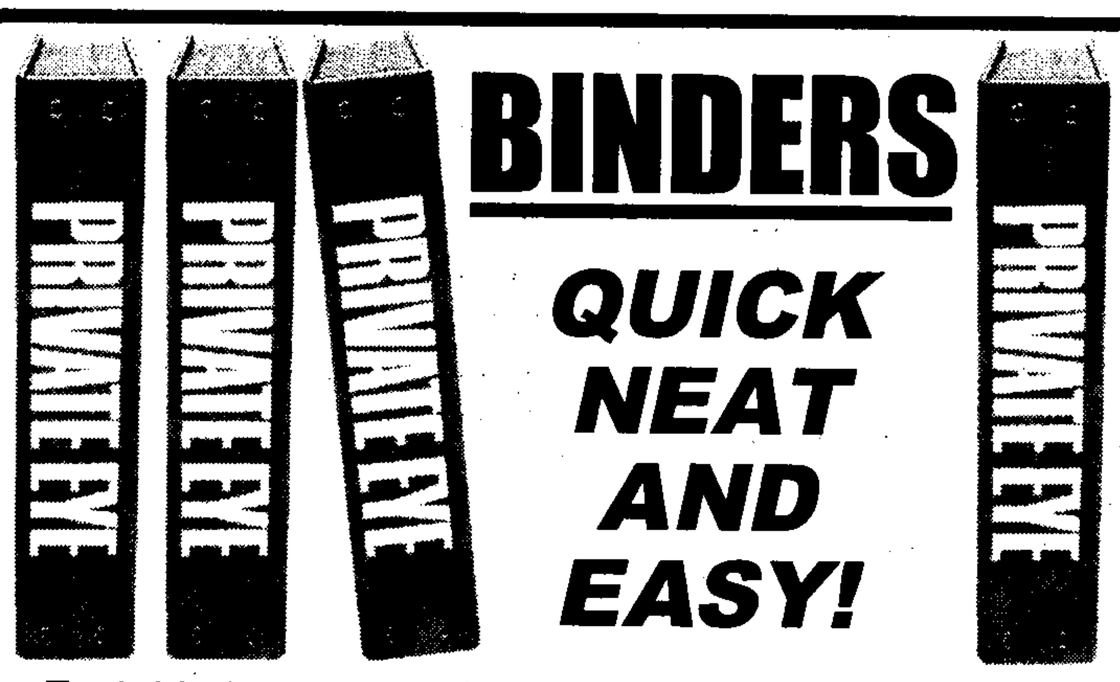

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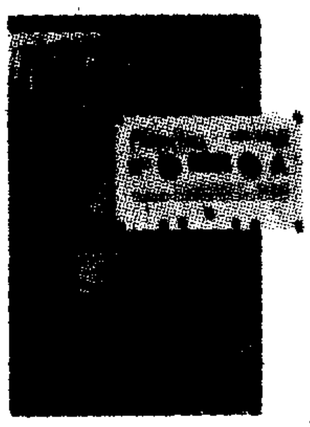

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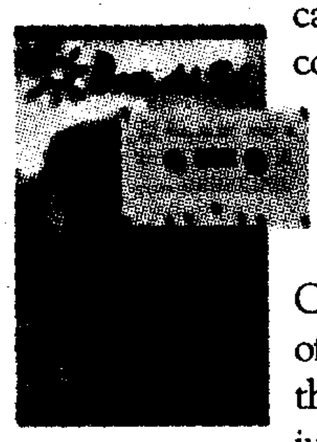

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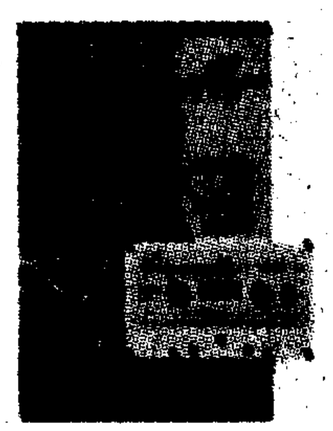

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